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**Noble Pagans and Satanic Saracens:
Literary Portrayals of Islam in Medieval Italy and Iberia**

by

John Spencer Jones

Honors Thesis

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University of Richmond
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Abstract

The medieval Christian world is generally associated with a kind of religious zealotry that would seem to preclude the development of nuanced understandings of the religious Other. The heightened interreligious contact in regions such as Iberia and the Italian Peninsula, however, made room for relationships with members of other faiths that resulted in more developed ideas about these other creeds. This honors thesis examines the portrayal of Islam in the Christian literature of medieval Italy and Iberia, dating from the late 11th century to the middle of the 14th century. It categorizes a few types of the literary “use” of Islam, all of which extend beyond the simple expression of antipathy. Some authors used a supposed “threat” of Muslim invasion to assert the political legitimacy of Christian kings, while others used the foreignness of Islam to justify the morally-dubious actions of their patrons. Associating a political enemy with a supposed Muslim “heresy” was used as a rhetorical strategy in conflicts between Christians. Finally, some Christian authors portrayed Muslim characters in ways that betrayed a kind of admiration or even an attitude of ambivalence towards religious alterity. This thesis argues that the multiplicity of these portrayals suggests that religious difference was not always an intractable source of intercultural antipathy; instead, it could be emphasized or downplayed in order to suit an author or group’s specific *situational* needs.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Polemic and Political Legitimacy.....	13
1a: The Literature of Alfonso X and the Saracen Threat.....	14
Chapter 2: Loot and Conquest.....	19
2a: <i>El Canter del Mio Cid</i> and The Metonymical Transformation of the Moor.....	21
2b: The Worldly Ambitions of Count Roger.....	26
Chapter 3: The Saracen as Rhetorical Device.....	30
3a: The Sympathetic Muslim in <i>The Deeds of Count Roger</i>	31
3b: <i>The Chronicle of Falco of Benevento</i> and Roger II's Saracen Soldiers.....	35
3c: Frederick II's Feuds with the Papacy - <i>Inferno</i> and Invective.....	40
Chapter 4: Tolerance, Toleration, and the Possibility of Convivencia.....	48
4a: The Muslims of <i>Inferno</i>	48
4b: Abengalbón, "Ideal Friend" of The Cid.....	54
4c: Boccaccio and the Parable of the Three Rings.....	58
Conclusion:.....	65
Works Cited.....	67
Primary Sources.....	67
Secondary Sources.....	68

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Introduction

In the popular consciousness, the European Middle Ages are generally associated with the classic romantic images of castles, kings, and knights, as well the bleaker visions of religious zealotry, bellicose society, and the intolerance of foreign peoples and practices. It should not be too surprising, then, that the Crusades loom large in the popular awareness of the medieval era; the Christian incursions into the Levant are emblematic of all these associations. Hearing “The Crusades” conjures images of the spectacular battle scenes seen in film, and a particular breed of violence brought about by religious fervor and intercultural antipathy. Understanding the Middle Ages this way, one could develop certain assumptions about the nature of all interreligious encounters in the era, particularly those between Christians and Muslims. One might imagine a world of intractable religious difference, in which the only possible interfaith relationships were antagonistic. The reality of such exchanges in the Middle Ages, however, was much more nuanced, and could be responsive to interests and values outside of the religious hegemony.

Take, for example, the medieval Christian literary treatment of Saladin (1138-1193), sultan of Egypt and Syria. Despite being the most recognizable military adversary of Christendom during the Crusades, Saladin appears in numerous histories, poems, and stories as a noble, charitable, and wise figure. According to William of Tyre (1130-1186), Saladin was “a man of keen intelligence... vigorous in war and unusually generous.”¹ Other works indulge in apocryphal renditions of the chivalric encounters between the Sultan and the Christian Crusader and King of England Richard I (1157-1199).² In general, Saladin is treated warmly in the

¹ William of Tyre, “Revolution in Egypt,” in *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum*, XX, 5-10, *Patrologia Latina* 201, trans. James Brundage (Internet History Sourcebooks Project) <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/tyre-cde.asp>.

² Christine Chism, “Saladin and Richard I,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the Crusades* ed. by Anthony Bale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

literature – he is romanticized and exoticized as an avatar of chivalry and Oriental splendor. Yet, this image clashes with the historical context the West had encountered him in. Saladin soundly defeated Crusading armies on several occasions, retaking the lands which Christians had acquired in the previous Crusades. In a society as religiously fervent as medieval Europe, how could a person like Saladin be remembered – and mythologized – so fondly?

There are several possible explanations for Saladin's depictions, ranging from Saladin's just treatment of conquered Christians to the theological insecurity faced by Christians who had been defeated by the religious *Other*. It is clear that Saladin's depictions were not expressions of an inflexible and zealous disdain for Muslims; if that had been the case, he would not have been portrayed so positively. How, then, might other Muslims be portrayed in the contemporary literature? Might their depictions (or uses) in the texts reflect interests and ideologies beyond Christianity's exclusivist contempt towards other faiths? To examine these issues more narrowly, this thesis will survey the literary depictions of Islam and its practitioners in Christian literature from Iberia and Italy from the late 11th century to the middle of the 14th century.

This topic is chosen with respect to four particularities. First, it examines sources from the hegemonic Christian perspective rather than those of disempowered groups in Europe – Jews, Muslims, pagans, etc. In doing so, it seeks to examine how the issue of religious alterity was understood and addressed by those in power. When was religious orthodoxy enforced, and when was it compromised to suit other political or social ends? How might Christians have *used* Muslims and the popular understandings of Islam to their advantage? Second, it centers the literary treatment of Muslims rather than the other aforementioned religious minorities. It is important to note that these other religious minorities were subjected to similar policies of

prosecution and ostracization.³ Islam, however, was a unique source of theological, social, and political anxiety for medieval Christians. During the era in question, European Christendom was flanked by two distinct, protracted, and reclamatory military campaigns against Islam. At its western reaches in Iberia, Christian kings prosecuted the *Reconquista* (722-1492), with the intent to drive out the Moors who had conquered the peninsula in the early 8th century. To the east, Crusaders from across Europe, under the auspices of the papacy, ventured to the Levant, hoping to reclaim the Holy Land for the “true” faith.⁴

Aside from military rivalry, Islam posed a theological problem for Christians. Admiring the splendor of Baghdad, Riccoldo da Montecroce (c. 1243-1320), an Italian monk who traveled to the East to preach, wrote “What could be the cause... of so much worldly prosperity for the perfidious Saracen people?”⁵ Christians of the Middle Ages interpreted historical events and the nature of present reality to be the realization of God’s divine will. The successful Muslim conquests of Christian lands and the comparative flourishing (scientifically and culturally) of Muslim society, then, seemed to prompt worrisome questions relating to which “side” God was

³ In fact, the social restrictions imposed upon or limited toleration afforded to Jewish people informed the treatment of Muslims in some cases, as under Frederick II in Sicily (David Abulafia, “Ethnic Variety and its Implications: Frederick II’s Relations with Jews and Muslims.” In *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen*, edited by William Tronza (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1994), 214-215). Furthermore, the law codes of Christian Iberian rulers such as Ramon Berenguer IV of Barcelona’s “Usatges of Barcelona” and Alphonso X of Castille’s “Siete Partidas” afforded the same protections to converted Jews and converted Moors alike (*Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, 2nd ed, Edited by Olivia Remie Constable, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 169 & 400-404).

⁴ The Crusades began in 1095, but their end date is disputed, as the scholars have not settled upon what constitutes a “Crusade.” The most well-known campaigns in the Holy Land lasted from 1095-1291.

⁵ Riccoldo da Montecroce, qtd. in Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), xiii.

on. As such, the “problem” Islam posed to Christians was distinct from that of Jews or pagans, who were similarly oppressed within Europe, but not as significant of a threat.

The third particularity of this topic is that it is geographically restricted to Iberia and Italy (including Sicily). In these two regions, the interfaith dynamics between Christians and Muslims were far more complex than elsewhere in European Christendom. They were both geographically proximate to Muslim lands (across the Mediterranean) and had themselves been partially controlled by Islamic kingdoms in the past, retaining elements of the prior cultures and populations. As opposed to their counterparts in places like Germany, Christians living in these regions were more likely to have known Muslims as neighbors, business partners, allies, and even friends rather than just as military enemies or deviant heretics (though such relationships were certainly also prevalent in Italy and Iberia at the time). Prior to the Christian *Reconquista*, Iberia had been almost entirely controlled by a number of Muslim emirates and city states.⁶ The social order of these kingdoms was predicated upon a pragmatic *Convivencia* – interfaith coexistence – that echoed into the post-reconquest Christian order. Similarly, Sicily was ruled by an Arab Emirate from the early 9th century until the Norman conquests of Southern Italy during the 11th century. Like Iberia, Sicilian society was characterized by a system of complicated and comparatively tolerant interfaith social dynamics. Norman rule throughout the 11th and 13th

⁶ The Muslims of Iberia were known to Christians as “Moors,” which I will use when speaking about Muslims in Iberian texts.

centuries saw the progressive Christianization of Sicily by both the Greek and Latin churches, which, through sectarian violence and forced relocations, ultimately resulted in the end of any substantial Muslim presence in Sicily.⁷ At the same time, the culture and politics of the pre-existing Sicilian-Islamic order had a pronounced impact upon the Norman Kings and their courts, and in spite of a general trend of increasing oppression against Muslims, many Muslims served Norman kings as advisors or soldiers. Accordingly, the Norman holdings in Sicily and Italy were also notable sites of interfaith exchange.

Fourth and finally, this thesis is focused on the era from the end of the 11th century to the middle of the 14th century. This time frame does not correlate to any of the traditional demarcations of the Middle Ages (Early, High, Late), but rather focuses on a few key historical events and cultural shifts. I've chosen to start my analysis with the final decades of the 11th century, which saw the Norman conquest of Sicily, the initiation of the First Crusade, and the first reconquests of the Cid in Iberia. The proceeding two-and-a-half centuries were characterized by sectarian violence and the conquest of lands once held by members of other faiths. Furthermore, this period saw a general increase in the persecution of heretics and other unorthodox (i.e., non-Christian) religious groups.⁸ The Great Crusades began and ended, Sicilian Islam was virtually eliminated, and the project of reconquest in Iberia was all but completed. I've

⁷ David Abulafia, "The End of Norman Sicily," in *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen*, ed. by William Tronza. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1994), 103.

⁸ Eugene Smelyansky, ed., *The Intolerant Middle Ages*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), xiii.

chosen to end this period of analysis with the middle of the 14th century, roughly coinciding with the promulgation of the Black Death across Europe and, shortly thereafter, the completion of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The destruction brought about by the plague represents a substantial disruption in medieval society, and the completion of both *The Decameron* and Dante's *Commedia* just decades before the plague serve as literary reflections of the previous centuries.

This setting, geographically and temporally, offers a more diverse and nuanced assortment of literary portrayals of Islam than an examination of, for instance, Central European sources. In the time period this thesis examines, Christendom came to “discover” Islam, which is to say, the heightened interfaith contact of the Crusades, *Reconquista*, and Norman conquests allowed understandings of Islam to develop which were both more complete and more complex.⁹ Prior to this, Islam was generally thought to be a distant and idolatrous form of paganism, akin to the religious practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans: the opening lines of the 11th century French poem *The Song of Roland*, for instance, declare that the Moorish King Marsile “serves Muhammad and calls upon *Apollo*.”¹⁰ As John Tolan notes, however, such images of Islam as paganism “die[d] quickly among those who [had] closer contact with Islam.”¹¹ While this shift was occurring across Europe at this time, it was most pronounced in Italy and Iberia.

⁹ John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, 167.

¹⁰ *The Song of Roland*, trans. Glynn Burton, (New York: Penguin Group, 1990) 1:8, 29. My emphasis.

¹¹ John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, 134.

Importantly, this heightened understanding did not necessarily result in a more tolerant society.¹² Instead, and as these sources will show, it allowed Christian authors to employ differing literary portrayals of Muslims and Islam – positive, negative, or neutral – to meet their own interests. In this way, Muslims were conveniently pliable textual subjects for Christian writers; their portrayal was subject to the author’s *situation*.

In *Ethnic Variety as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages*, Historian Patrick Geary argues:

*Ethnicity did not exist as an objective category but rather as a subjective and malleable category by which various preexisting likenesses could be manipulated symbolically to mold an identity and a community.*¹³

In other words, understandings of the self, and of a self-identified community, were not absolute or intractable. Rather, group or community identifications were elastic, with some aspects accentuated or ignored as suited a specific need or situation.

In *The Second Sex*, Philosopher Simone De Beauvoir employs a model of alterity that emphasizes the centrality of the *Other* to the *One*’s (that is, the person or group self-identifying and establishing an *Other*) sense of self.¹⁴ A person or group’s identity is formulated with respect

¹² For instance, many Christians came to see Islam as a kind of heresy (see Chapter 4).

¹³ Patrick J Geary, “Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages,” *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* Vol. 113 (1983): 16.

¹⁴ De Beauvoir’s main analytical focus in *The Second Sex* is the *Otherness* of women in society. Her model of alterity, however, is broadly applicable to other in-group/out-group dynamics – De Beauvoir herself maps the concept onto the relationships between “natives” and “foreigners,” anti-Semites and Jews, etc. As such, I believe that it is relevant to understanding a medieval Christendom’s relationship to Islam, its theological, military, and

to an *Other*, and the presence and understanding of an *Other* provides definition and structure to the self. The *Other* is “at the heart of a whole whose two components are necessary to each other” – it is vital to the *One*’s understanding of itself, and the psychological conception of the *Other* only exists in the mind of the *One*.¹⁵

When syllogistically combined, these two concepts form the theoretical undergirding of this thesis: If identity is derived from the understanding of the *Other*, and, if, at this time, identity was *situationally* developed, then the relationship to the *Other* must have itself been *situational*. In this essay, I argue that Muslims were understood through a kind of *situational alterity* in the Middle Ages, meaning that the treatment or understanding of their *Otherness* was subject to *situational* needs. This essay will locate the *situational alterity* of Muslims in several texts from medieval Iberia and Italy; in doing so, it seeks to demonstrate how these changing understandings of the *Other* reflect the multiplicity of goals and identities *within* Christendom.

Two other theoretical elements appear throughout the essay to complement the argument, which I will canvass here. First is that of the *Dual Image*.¹⁶ This term refers to the observation that Muslims usually appear in medieval literature as either enlightened, noble foreigners or as

cultural rival. Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2009) 6.

¹⁵ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 9.

¹⁶ This phenomenon is noted by different scholars under different names, including the “Two Images” (Dwayne Carpenter, “Social Perception and Literary Portrayal: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Spanish Literature,” in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. by Mann, V.B., Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn D. Dodds, 61-82. (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1992), 75.) and the “Twin Image” (Israel Burshatin. “The Moor in the Text: Metaphor, Emblem, and Silence,” in *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1985, Vol. 12, no. 1. (1985): 98.). In this essay, I will stick to the term *Dual Image*.

savage, benighted heretics. These two seemingly contradictory images are not mutually exclusive for medieval authors: in some cases, both images might be present in the same text. In these instances, the *Dual Image* is highly illustrative of *situational alterity*, as it shows the treatment of the *Other* change as a situation changes *within* a text.

Second is Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* which, broadly, is the phenomena of the "West" (in this case, Christendom) creating and perpetuating its own constructed vision of the "Orient" (in this case, the Muslim world) to suit its own ends. *Orientalism* helps refine our understanding of the *situation* the Christian writers in this study. Of course, the Middle Age's nascent form of *Orientalism* does not fully embody the modern iteration Said describes (Said is concerned with a 19th century intellectual history that, for this project's temporal scope, has not yet occurred). However, a number of important components of modern *Orientalism* existed or developed in this era. Two important takeaways about the nature of *Orientalism* inform this project: first, that the Western image of the Orient (i.e., Muslims, Islam) does not need an exact grounding in reality, nor must it be held constant; rather, it is molded around the Western hegemony's interests (i.e., *situationally*). Second, that the ability of the hegemonic power to impute *Orientalized* qualities onto other groups is predicated upon a "flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient

without ever losing him the relative upper hand.”¹⁷ In other words, constructions of the Orient come from a place of power and always portray it as, in some way, beneath the West.

In Iberia and Italy, Christian kingdoms faced the dilemma of upholding (or, appearing to uphold) exclusionary Christian values while also facing the practical issues of governing religiously heterogenous societies. This thesis investigates the ways that the contemporary literature reflects how these societies, or certain figures of authority, handled this dilemma and ones like it. The multiplicity in types of literary portrayal that Muslims receive in these texts illustrates the *situational alterity* of Muslims.

This thesis is not a comprehensive overview of all the possible literary depictions of Islam in this body of literature. Rather, it provides several case studies of a few drastically differing portrayals and the “Saracen”¹⁸ that appear in these texts (and the idiosyncrasies within them). In particular, it focuses on some seminal texts of the era: Dante’s *Inferno*, Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, and *El Cantar Del Mio Cid*. It also examines the literary and propagandistic elements of various contemporary histories, such as Malaterra’s *Deeds of Count Roger* and Alfonso X’s various commissioned works. Through these examples, we can identify a few common threads, such as the accentuation of religious difference and anti-Islamic antipathy, as

¹⁷ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 7.

¹⁸ In this essay, I will be using the term “Saracen” to refer to idea of Muslims as constructed in medieval Christian literature and popular imagination, as opposed to the actual, historical Muslims, whom I will refer to as such. (This useful distinction is borrowed from Gloria Allaire, “Noble Saracen or Muslim Enemy?,” in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 174.)

well as some notable exceptions and apparent subversions. Chapter 1 addresses the most unsurprising literary treatment of Islam: the polemic. At this historical juncture, largely defined by sectarian violence and religious intolerance, literature designed to insult Islam or demonize Muslims reflected both genuine antipathy as well as discrete propaganda projects; for some Christian kings, the polemic was a tool of asserting political legitimacy.

Chapter 2 examines the relationship between the worldly ambitions of military conquest and the higher order religious considerations underpinning interreligious warfare. In particular, it focuses on the apparent contradiction between abstemious Christian values and wartime plunder. Christian authors used the alterity of conquered Muslims to reconcile this contradiction and preserve the integrity of their protagonists.

Chapter 3 analyzes a few of the ways where references to “Islam” – by association or comparison – are employed as rhetorical tools in intrareligious conflicts. Though different authors went about this in different ways, in general, they highlighted connections to Islam as an insult or an attack. To be “implicated” in a perceived Muslim Heresy was a dangerous liability to one’s reputation, and Christian authors leveraged this rhetorical strategy to condemn certain figures or delegitimize political rivals.

Chapter 4 ends this essay on an apparent subversion. It surveys some instances in the literature of this era that suggest a more tolerant attitude – or at least, a more nuanced understanding of – towards religious difference. In contrast to much of the literature in the

preceding chapters, many of the works examined here see Muslims characters cast in a positive light, appearing as allies, figures of esteem, benefactors, and even friends.

Chapter 1: Polemic and Political Legitimacy

In 881, San Vincenzo al Volturno, a monastery in southern Italy, was brutally sacked by a band of raiding Muslims. As the story is told in the twelfth-century *Chronicle of San Vincenzo al Volturno*, the monks at the monastery made a brave stand, but were ultimately betrayed by their cowardly serfs. The account of the raid is particularly gory: heads are severed, and blood is spattered on the foundation that stains it eternally.¹⁹ This tale is told in a way that belabors the particular viciousness and sacrilege of the Muslims. They do not simply raid to plunder, but revel in profaning the holy and killing the innocent. The Saracens are part of an “evil race,” “than whom no beast is more fierce,” and, in spite of having laid waste to much of the region, are “not yet satiated with human blood.”²⁰ To get in to the monastery and access its treasures, they “[seduce] the minds of the serfs with golden gifts and deadly promises.²¹ Worse yet, after taking their plunder, they destroy everything inside, throw all of the produce into the river, drink from the holy chalices, and use the church incense. At the end of the gruesome affair, the monastery was “not the habitation of man, but the possession of many beasts... [and] more humble than anywhere else.”²²

From this piece, we are left with several implications about the author’s vision of both the individual raiders and Muslims as a whole. To start, there is something inhuman about them – twice they are likened to beasts for their cruelty. They are of an evil *race*, not just an evil creed, suggesting this that the atrocities committed in this story reflect the desires and capacities of all Muslims at large. They are deceptive, tricking weak Christians into doing their bidding.

¹⁹ “Chronicle of San Vincenzo al Volturno,” trans. Graham Loud, in *Medieval Italy: Texts in Translation*, ed. Jansen, K.L., Joanna Drell, and Frances Andrews (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) 114.

²⁰ “Chronicle of San Vincenzo al Volturno,” 113.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

²² *Ibid.*, 115.

Furthermore, these raiders are deliberately setting out to profane Christian symbols and sites; there is an implication of an intractable interfaith antagonism. Islam and its practitioners are evil, enemy, anathema – they are *Other*.

The presentation of Muslims in this story reflects the classic image of interfaith relations in the era: bitter antipathy for the religious *Other*, fueled by exclusionary religious doctrine and centuries of violent conflict. As this example shows, there is some merit to this stereotype. Indeed, it was not uncommon for Christian writers to engage in polemics – literature designed to attack or denigrate a person or group. While the rest of this essay will go on to examine ulterior motives to specific portrayals of Islam, it is important to know that many Christians would have felt genuine hatred for their religious *Other* for the simple fact of their alterity. This antipathy, in turn, had the potential to be *situationally* channeled for other reasons, as some of the later chapters will investigate further. One such application of anti-Islamic sentiment was to underscore the political legitimacy of certain groups or rulers. In the rest of this chapter, I will historically situate similar polemics in the literature of the Castilian-Leónese court under Alfonso X.

1a: The Literature of Alfonso X and the Saracen Threat

Alfonso X (1221-1284), King of Castile and León is a perplexing figure. He was a great purveyor of culture and scholarship, known for commissioning many histories and works of literature; for his intellectualism, he was dubbed *el sabio*, “the wise.”²³ Presiding over a diverse kingdom, he freely drew courtly influences from the Moors and Jews alike. Historians generally view his rule as having been “benevolent and just towards people of all races, creeds, and

²³ Charles Sumner Lobinger, “Las Siete Partidas in Full English Dress,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 9, no. 4 (Nov., 1929) 531.

cultures.”²⁴ At the same time, a great deal of his literary production has a strong anti-Islamic slant. In the *Siete Partidas*, a legal code drafted by Alfonso and his advisors, Islamic practice is referred to as “an insult to God,” and Islam, “a foolish belief.”²⁵ If his rule was comparatively tolerant, his textual production was not. What explains this disconnect? This contradiction is itself a demonstration of *situationality*; for the purposes of practicality – and indeed, Alfonso is remembered as “practical”²⁶ ruler – Muslims were treated in a generally benevolent manner. Sustaining a stable society in Iberia would have required the maintenance of *Convivencia*. At the same time, when ideology had to be espoused, the *alterity* of Islam – via notions of heresy, ignorance, and animacy – was emphasized. If we understand the literature Alfonso commissioned to be his ideological mouthpiece, then we can see this phenomenon take hold in his *Cántigas de Santa Maria* and his *Primera Crónica General de España*.

The *Cántigas* is a collection of canticles written in Galician-Portuguese and devoted to Saint Mary. They cover a wide range of topics and speak to various people and issues within Iberian society. Of the 427 canticles, 44 mention Moors, half of which see them engaged in some kind of military action.²⁷ Overwhelmingly, these depictions are negative; narratively, they see Moors humbled, defeated, and even at times even converted. These attacks on Islam in the *Cántigas* can be both ethnic and theological (demonstrating the strong correlation of the two in the medieval mind). For instance, Song 28 sees a dramatic reconstruction of the siege of Constantinople, in which a “thick-lipped,” “bearded,” “savage and bloodthirsty” Sultan’s attacks on the city are repelled by the supernatural power of Saint Mary.²⁸ Already, there are strong

²⁴ Albert I. Bagby Jr., “Some Characterizations of the Moor in Alfonso X’s ‘Cantigas’,” *The South Central Bulletin*, Winter, 1970, Vol. 30, no. 4. (1970) 164.

²⁵ “Siete Partidas 7:25,” qtd in Tolán, *Saracens*, 174.

²⁶ Lobinger, “Las Siete Partidas in Full English Dress,” 532.

²⁷ Albert I. Bagby Jr., “Some Characterizations of the Moor in Alfonso X’s ‘Cantigas’,” 164.

²⁸ *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, the Wise: A Translation of the Cantigas de Santa Maria*, trans. Kathleen Kulp-Hill. (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), Song 28, 39.

ethnic and racial elements at play in this song – the Sultan’s physical attributes are highlighted in the poem to accentuate his alterity, and the emphasis on his and his army’s bloodlust resemble the notion of intractable Saracen brutality espoused in the story of San Vincenzo.

As the assault begins, the sultan has catapults and arrows fire on the city, but Saint Mary’s holy mantle deflects the blows and keeps the walls standing. Discouraged, the Sultan “began to call on Mohammed, a false friend, to come to help him, but he was deceived.”²⁹ Upon seeing the Holy Virgin, he “realized he was a sinner, for he saw that it was a miracle of Our Lord,” and repents, renouncing his “pagan” ways to be baptized.³⁰ The penitent Sultan showers the city in gifts, and swears to protect it from any other threats. In the song, Islam is shown to be a false paganism, and a belief that is easily dissuaded by exposure to the “truth” of the Christian faith. Mohammed is not simply incorrect, but a “false friend” – one who actively deceives his followers. These attacks on Muslim theology are found throughout the *Cántigas*, and at times it seems like even Muslim characters will acknowledge the falsity of their faith. In Song 95, Saint Mary protects a Christian pilgrim from being abducted by a band of Moors when she prevents their ship from sailing away. The frightened captors call to Mohammed, but their “intelligent and wise” admiral realizes the folly of their mission, proclaiming “Friends, he who goes against God’s will is foolish.”³¹ Indeed, it is the most sensible of the Moors who realizes that he and his crew are defying the will of God. At no point do the Moors convert, however, but simply acknowledge the divine favor afforded to the Christians the power of Saint Mary.

The *Cántigas* are replete with these kinds of polemics against both Muslims as a people and Islam as faith. In his analysis of the *Cántigas*, Albert Bagby Jr. argues that these negative

²⁹ *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, the Wise: A Translation of the Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Song 28, 39.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Song 28, 40.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Song 95, 121.

portrayals reflect, to some degree, “what [Alfonso] knew his subjects wanted to see portrayed in Moors” and his own “personal feelings and prejudices.”³² Certainly the insistent degradation of Moors would suggest as much; these depictions are not only hostile, but often mocking or insulting. The simple fact of prejudice, however, is an incomplete understanding of Alfonso’s use of anti-Islamic polemic. As John Tolan argues, the falseness and illegitimacy of Islam are central to “the ideological justification of Muslim Spaniards to Christian Castilian rule.”³³ Expanding on this, it seems that anti-Islamic polemic was also a more general means of creating political legitimacy for Alfonso; the impending threat of Moorish conquest, rendered in lurid detail in depictions of Islamic violence, was accentuated to demonstrate the need for Christian rule.

This argument for Christian hegemony is advanced more directly in the *Primera Crónica General de España*, a history of Castile and León commissioned by Alfonso. The *Crónica* features several narrative retellings of the reconquest of Moorish Iberia by Alfonso’s predecessors. As with any work commissioned by a king, we should expect it to suit his interests; histories such as the *Crónica* are powerful tools of propaganda and political legitimacy, as they establish a continuity between past and present. The prior beneficence of Christian kings and the cruelty of Moorish kings should be read as a statement about those respective systems of rule. We can find an example of the this in the *Crónica*’s retelling of Alfonso VI’s (1040-1109) reconquest of Toledo.

The story begins with a brief genealogy of the Moorish rulers of Toledo, ending with Yahia Al-cadirbille, “an evil and villainous king... far removed from the manners and the

³² Albert I. Bagby Jr., “Some Characterizations of the Moor in Alfonso X’s ‘Cantigas’,” 164.

³³ John Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination*, 174.

customs” of his father and grandfather.³⁴ He “inflicted so much pain and violence on [his people] that everyone longed for his death because they saw that he was an evil and vile man and had no good within him.”³⁵ As his people are starving and assaulted by raiders and enemies, he ignores their pleas for help, causing them to secretly ask King Alfonso for help. After years of siege on the city, Alfonso returns with an overwhelmingly large army, and upon the surrender of the Moors, establishes peace in the troubled town. He even respects the terms of their surrender, allowing them to continue worshipping in the town’s mosque.³⁶

Once again, we see the exaggerated depiction of Moorish bloodlust and cruelty in the *Crónica*’s depiction of King Yahia. He is thoroughly unredeemable – he not only neglects his subjects, but actively harms them. The sheer barbarism of his reign makes his Moorish subjects turn to a Christian king (so preferable is Christian rule to Moorish rule). For Alfonso X, commissioning this work several generations, this story carries an appealing propagandistic message: King Yahia’s inhumanity is emblematic of Muslim dominance, and it is Castilian-Leónese rule that protects us from it. Reading this story as an endorsement of Alfonso’s reign helps situate the anti-Islamic antipathy of his other works. Alfonso legitimizes his rule and his lineage in constructing an *otherizing* image of Muslims that he can contrast with his own virtue.

³⁴ “Primera Crónica General de España”, trans. John Moscatiello, in *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, ed. Olivia Remie Constable. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) 132.

³⁵ “Primera Crónica General de España”, 132.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

Chapter 2: Loot and Conquest

At the 1095 Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II (r. 1088-1099), calling for the First Crusade, emphasized the need for crusaders to “first correct [themselves]” before they could go to war against “this foolish people which is so devoted to the pleasures of this world [the Saracens].”³⁷ Prior to leaving for Holy Land, many crusaders would turn over their worldly possessions to the Church for the duration of their journey, and would take vows of sexual abstinence.³⁸ To go on a crusade was to embark on a spiritual pilgrimage, not simply participate in what Urban II referred to as “private war.”³⁹ In theory, Urban II wanted the Crusaders to be paragons of Christian virtue, defined in opposition to Saracen perfidy, greed, and lasciviousness. In reality, crusaders were often no better than the polemical image of the Saracen that Urban II described. Breakaway movements of the First Crusade brutally pillaging and massacred Jewish communities in Europe, and some engaged in “illicit [sexual] unions and the pleasures of the flesh” in the Holy Land.⁴⁰ In *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, Norman Daniel argues “the hopes for the [First] Crusade, while they succeeded materially, were spiritually disappointed.”⁴¹ He continues:

*If the great lords were tempted partly by the hope of new lands and partly by the hope of heaven, it seems that the masses had a similar dual temptation, but after their own fashion. Their religion was an enthusiasm with little personal application, and the immediate result of their liberation from ordinary social restraints was a progressive self-destruction.*⁴²

³⁷ Fulcher of Chartres, “Urban II’s Speech at Clermont,” In *Gesta Francorum Jerusalem Expugnantium*, trans. Oliver J Thatcher (Internet History Sourcebooks Project) <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/urban2-5vers.asp>.

³⁸ Thomas F. Madden, *The New Concise History of the Crusades: Updated Edition* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005), 10.

³⁹ Fulcher of Chartres, “Urban II’s Speech at Clermont.”

⁴⁰ Albert of Aix, qtd. in Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, 124.

⁴¹ Norman Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1975), 124.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 123-4.

In this passage, Daniel articulates the friction found in the prosecution of “Holy War.” The supposed spiritual motivations of the crusades did not stop worldly interests – sex, money, land, and political power – from informing the incentives and actions of crusaders, noble or common; many were possessed of this “dual temptation,” as Daniel puts it, between religious obligation and temporal desire. The peasants being discussed in the passage above, under the auspices of divine right, indulged themselves in ways that were directly contradictory to those same religious mores in regular circumstances.

This tension between Holy War and material gain complicates any singular conception of Crusading motivation and instead invites what Johnathan Riley-Smith refers to as a *Pluralist* analysis. Proponents of the *Pluralist* conception of Crusading motivation argue that the Crusades were not motivated solely by religious fervor or material gain, but rather a collection of different factors.⁴³ In extending this *Pluralist* to realms beyond the Levant such as Mediterranean Europe (as scholars such as Riley-Smith do), we might better reconcile the infiltration of materialistic motives into other Christian-Muslim interfaces, specifically those of Christian conquest within Western Europe. Nominally “Holy Wars” can be understood as possessing both religious ethos and materialistic impetus.

Many of the texts discussed so far have been narratives of war and conquest. With military victory, in the Middle Ages, came ransom, loot and plunder. In both the Spanish *El Cantar del Mio Cid* and the Norman *Deeds of Count Roger*, the loot acquired from victory against Muslim combatants is a focal point in the Christians’ conquests. It would seem that centering the temporal gains of money and power would cause friction with the religious components of Christian conquest; these works, however, navigate this issue in such a way that

⁴³ Johnathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). 9.

allows their central figures to retain (or even enhance) their nobility and divine favor while also profiting immensely from their conquests. It is precisely the Orientalist positional superiority of Christianity and the *situational alterity* of Muslims that allows Christians authors to reconcile the dual temptations found in interreligious conquest and vindicate their protagonists' materialistic desires.

2a: *El Cantar del Mio Cid* and The Metonymical Transformation of the Moor

El Cantar del Mio Cid is a Castilian epic poem which recounts the exploits of the eponymous Cid, Rodrigo Díaz (1043-1099), a disgraced knight who leads his army on a wave of conquests across Iberia throughout the 11th century. Set during the *Taifa* period – a time where Iberia was divided into a number of Christian and Muslim city-states – it sees the Cid win his way back into the favor of the Christian king Alfonso VI (r. 1065-1109) through battles against both Christian and Muslim foes. It is believed that this poem was composed sometime in the early 13th century, though it is unclear whether it began as a written work or was derived from an earlier oral tradition⁴⁴. The text that exists today is a 14th century copy of a 13th century edition of the story, and to this day the opening of the story, which is believed to tell the story of how the Cid fell out with Alfonso, remains missing.⁴⁵

Despite being thoroughly rooted both historically and narratively in reconquest, *El Cid* does not roundly antagonize Muslims in the way that other contemporary works tended to. In fact, its treatment of Muslims is one of the least polemical examples in this study. As will be discussed at further length in section 4a, the Cid's army is comprised of both Muslims and Christians, and one of his closest allies is Abengalbón, a Moorish noble. The Cid even

⁴⁴ Though there is debate as to whether or not this poem is derived from oral tradition or a single educated author, in this essay I will refer to the editorializing voice of the author as “the poet” for readability.

⁴⁵ María Rosa Menocal. “Introduction.” In *The Song of the Cid: A Dual-Language Edition with Parallel Text*, trans. Burton Raffel, (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), xix.

sympathizes with the Muslims he faces in battle. Praying as he prepares to face off against a Muslim counterattack, the Cid notes “We’ve invaded their lands, we’ve wronged them over and over / We’ve eaten their bread and drunk their wine / Here they are to besiege us; surely they have that right.”⁴⁶

Though *El Cid* is more tolerant of non-Christians than other similar Reconquista epics such as the *Chanson de Roland*, it still goes out of its way to emphasize the alterity of non-Christians in the story. Such distinctions are thoroughly embedded in actual prose of the work. When a character or the author would, in a more modern context, use the words “everybody” or “everyone,” they instead use the phrase “moros y christianos” (“Muslims and Christians”) or a similar idiom.⁴⁷ Even in battles where the Cid and his mixed army of Christians and Moors raid a Moorish holding, the conflict is framed as a battle of between Christians and Moors because of the Cid’s leadership.⁴⁸ There is certainly a multiplicity in the types of relationships Moors and Christians may have, ranging from close friendship to bitter antipathy, but the distinction is, as Joachim Küpper notes, “systematically thematized in the text” through the use of “direct apostrophization or by reference to particular religious practices.”⁴⁹ In other words, the poem is consistent in its observation of religious difference – through explicit assignation, mentions in dialogue, or reference to stereotypes, each character or group’s faith is made readily apparent to the reader. This thematization is not limited to textual features and idioms, however, but also plays out in the way the plunder from Moors is treated by the poet.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *The Song of the Cid*, Canto 2:66, 88.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Canto 1:49, 63.

⁴⁸ Example in Canto 1:39, p 53. In capturing Valencia, the poet writes “What a magnificent day for the Christians, / Seeing the Moors turn and run! / My Cid’s follower’s chased after them...” The Cid’s mixed army is, at the moment of battle, a Christian army.

⁴⁹ Joachim Küpper “EL(AA)RONEIA: The Politics of Religion in the Cantar de mio Cid,” *MLN*, September, 2011, Vol. 126, no. 4., (2011): S65.

⁵⁰ One would be remiss to not mention the Iberian *Convivencia* included Jews as well as Christians and Moors. In *El Cid*, two Jewish characters, Raguel and Vidas appear at the beginnings of the first two cantos but have minimal

The Cid's honor is derived from looting and plundering. Like Roland in the thematically and temporally proximate *Chanson de Roland*, the exemplary vassalage of The Cid is a foremost element of his virtue and a signifier of his moral character. The two knights, condemned by scheming – notably Christian – traitors, prove their worth through their military prowess and unyielding devotion to both their lords and their own subordinates. Where Roland proves himself to be paragon of these feudal dynamics through his heroic stand at Roncevaux, the Cid's primary means of demonstrating his feudal nobility is through the acquisition and gifting of Moorish booty. As Küpper notes, "Honor [in *El Cid*] is the name for the public acknowledgement of the legitimacy of material wealth, legitimacy being a label that indicates the acknowledgement of the risk implicit in any attempt to take away the possessions in question."⁵¹ Put in other words, the acquisition of wealth through high-stakes conquest is effectively the performance of honor and nobility; following this logic, the disgraced Cid's conquests, violence and plunder – hitherto unsanctioned by his estranged King – are justified by virtue of their monetary gains for the Cid, his lord, and his troops.

The looting component of conquest is not just passingly addressed in the poem; it is as treated as an integral narrative component of the conquest scenes, as essential as descriptions of the battlefield violence. The loot acquired from the battlefield is granted as gifts to Alfonso and also used to pay his troops. The former allows the Cid to return to the good graces of his lord, which ultimately resolves the primary drama of the poem. The latter element is essential to the audience's understanding of the Cid's character. The reader is frequently reminded that the Cid

impact on the overall narrative; they, too, are singled out through antisemitic stereotypes which highlight their monetary avarice (Küpper, "EL(AA)RONEIA: The Politics of Religion in the Cantar de mio Cid," S69). The isolated stories of Raguél and Vidas, however, are only small parts of the text. The alterity of Muslims is more central to this narrative.

⁵¹ Küpper, "EL(AA)RONEIA: The Politics of Religion in the Cantar de mio Cid," S74.

not only pays his troops, but also pays them *well*, with the quality plunder acquired from conquered Moors. Having conquered Valencia and “won enormous booty,”⁵² the Cid and his men enter the city with new wealth:

*Now those who fought on foot had horses of their own, / And gold, and silver beyond description. / All his men were suddenly rich. / My Cid, Ruy Díaz, had his share of one-fifth, / Including thirty thousand marks in money - / But who could count the rest.*⁵³

The Cid’s victories, his competence as a leader, and his motivations are, first, defined in materialistic terms, even if they are sometimes justified in the vernacular of Holy War.⁵⁴ It is his success in acquiring and distributing great wealth that makes him a hero.

Having established the centrality of materialistic gain in *El Cid*, it is now important to look at where that loot comes from: the Moorish combatant. Often, the poem does not treat the enemy Moor as a person, but rather metonymically conflates them with their material possessions. Muslims are transformed, both by the poet and the characters, into plunder. When The Cid chases down Moroccan King Búcar on horseback, the poet describes how “My Cid struck the king’s helmet: / Pearls and other gems were scattered... He’d killed Búcar, won his sword, / Tizon, worth a thousand gold marks.”⁵⁵ In this description of the epic confrontation with the leader of a rival army, it is the monetary worth of Búcar’s sword and helmet that take center stage. It is not blood that pours from the slain Búcar but precious gems. This transformation is even stated outright: While watching the advance of Búcar’s Muslim armies, the poet notes that “My Cid and all his men were delighted, / Already counting up their loot – may God be praised!”⁵⁶ Looting typically occurs after victory has been achieved, but the Cid, confident in his

⁵² *The Song of the Cid*, Canto 2:68, 85.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Canto 2:74, 89.

⁵⁴ Throughout *El Cid*, victories are attributed to the grace of God, and the triumph of Christianity over its enemies is highlighted; in Canto 2:82, 89, the Cid is praised for restoring the bishopric in newly-conquered Valencia.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Cid, Canto 3:118, 169.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Canto 3:114, 161.

inevitable defeat of Búcar's armies, only sees the plunder that will come from his victory. The enemy is, in effect, already defeated, and for the Cid, simply loot to be collected rather than an active combatant.

Importantly, the poem treats Cid's Christian adversaries differently than his Moorish rivals. To start, the Christian Count of Barcelona, who attacks the Cid for raiding lands under his protection and is subsequently defeated, is not plundered, but rather simply "lost... what [the Cid] won in battle."⁵⁷ The encounter between the Count and the Cid is one of conquest and plunder, but more akin to a competition which the Cid wins and take prizes from. In fact, the Cid throws the Count a feast and showers him in gifts upon his release. Similarly, the Carrión brothers, Christians in Alfonso's court, who are the ultimate antagonists of the poem, are not looted by the Cid after he defeats them, but instead "paid their debts to the Warrior Cid, as they'd sworn / to do."⁵⁸ The Cid does not see them as enticing sources of wealth to enrich his lord and his men; the money acquired in these victories is only considered after the fact, simply an outcome or an obligation, respectively. The poet's choice to reduce Moorish enemies to their worldly possessions, but not Christian enemies, is another way in which religious difference is thematized in the text.

By transforming the Moor and not the Christian, the epic story of the Cid can be the same narrative of loot and conquest, and the Cid can remain a noble hero, without compromising the purported connection with Christian values, particularly the esteem of humility and condemnation of avarice. As Israel Burshatin argues, the Moor can be, for the Cid, "the reassuring and Orientalized projection of the hero's sway of valor on the battlefield."⁵⁹ Because

⁵⁷ Ibid., Canto 1:62, 73.

⁵⁸ Ibid., Canto 3:152, 245.

⁵⁹ Israel Burshatin. "The Moor in the Text: Metaphor, Emblem, and Silence," in *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1985, Vol. 12, no. 1. (1985): 100.

of their cultural and religious difference, Moors can comfortably be conflated with their material goods in this text. Within this logic lies the implication of the *Dual Image*; Moors are the enemies of Christendom, crying out to a false god before battle, but are also worthy opponents, noble enough to produce the highest quality crafts.

Syllogistically, the function of the Moorish enemy in this text is to be the springboard from which the hero proves and redeems his honor: The conquered Moor is reduced to their material goods; the Cid's nobility is derived from his material acquisitions in conquest; therefore, the Cid's honor is derived from these metonymically reduced Moors. The "transformation" – particularly in light of the esteem the poet grants to the Cid's Moorish allies – vivifies the positional component of *Orientalism*. The poet, writing from a hegemonic Christian standpoint, is free to alter the image of Muslims on sectarian lines as it suits his poetic needs; the "transformation" need not apply to the Cid's Moorish allies, or his Christian enemies.

2b: The Worldly Ambitions of Count Roger

During the 11th century, the Normans – the ethnic group stemming from a mixture of Norse and Frank ancestry – launched campaigns of conquest across the European and Mediterranean world. These expeditions were not a unified empire-building project, but rather comprised of differing interests, rival families, and tenuous alliances. Parts of the Norman conquests ventured south, through the Italian peninsula and, eventually, into Sicily. Since 965, Sicily had been entirely ruled by an Arab Emirate; Normans began the project of conquering Sicily in the 11th century, and in 1071, Roger I (1031-1101) having conquered most of the island, was invested as Count of Sicily. In 1091, his conquest was complete, and Sicily was entirely in Christian hands.

Around this time, various Norman rulers commissioned their own respective histories of their lineage and conquests. These commissions were not simple academic endeavors, but rather deliberate propaganda projects. The sudden success of the conquests necessitated the creation of histories designed to not only “celebrate Norman achievements,” but also “verify the legitimacy of Norman princes and authenticate the rights of Normans to inhabit and dominate their lands.”⁶⁰ These histories went about this in several ways. For instance, they might try to establish the Normans in Italy as the rightful successors of the Greeks and Lombards, who had inhabited the region previously.⁶¹ Norman conquest was generally a secular affair, more concerned with plunder or land acquisition than a broader ideological project, but many of these historians portrayed their benefactors as “champions of Christendom.”⁶² In the context of medieval Europe, particularly in a kingdom situated closely to the heart of the papacy, political legitimacy and adherence to the faith were indelibly linked. How could the validity of a conquest be challenged if it was done to advance the Christian cause?

Count Roger commissioned his own history: *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of his Brother Duke Robert Guiscard*.⁶³ This history was written by Geoffrey Malaterra, a monk whom we know little about; it is assumed that he was brought from Normandy to Sicily by Roger in order to help reestablish Church institutions on the island.⁶⁴ Of course, Malaterra was under the direct patronage of Roger, so his work had to be facially

⁶⁰ Emily Albu, *The Normans and their Histories The Normans and Their Histories: Propaganda, Myth, and Subversion* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2001), 2.

⁶¹ Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Making History: The Normans and Their Historians in Eleventh-Century Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1995), 20.

⁶² Albu, *The Normans and their Histories The Normans and Their Histories: Propaganda, Myth, and Subversion*, 3.
⁶³ In the original Latin, *De Rebus Gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae Comitis et Roberti Guiscardi Ducis Fratris Eius*.

⁶⁴ Wolf, *Making History: The Normans and Their Historians in Eleventh-Century Italy*, 144.

supportive of Count Roger's conquest and reign.⁶⁵ Like the other Norman historians, he makes appeals to the justness of Norman conquest, the legitimacy of their rule, and their divine favor.

Book two of the *Deeds* details Roger's conquest of Sicily. The section opens with Roger, having conquered Calabria, deciding to conquer the neighboring island:

Informing himself about Sicily, which was under the control of the infidels, and noticing how narrow the sea was that separated it from Calabria, Roger, who was always avid for domination, was seized with the ambition of obtaining it. He figured that it would be of profit to him in two ways – that is, to his soul and his body – if he could, on the one hand, reclaim the region, which had been given over to idols, to divine worship and, on the other – speaking in more temporal terms – appropriate for himself the fruits and revenues of the land, which had been usurped by a people disagreeable to God, and dispose of them in the service of God.⁶⁶

By Malaterra's account, the prospect of conquering Sicily was doubly enticing for Roger; he could both restore the land for Christendom while also reaping immense material gain for himself. It is striking that the latter is still couched in the fact of Sicilian religious alterity. To claim the "fruits and revenues of the land" in Sicily is not simply to reap the benefits of conquest, but rather to rectify the past injustice of the "usurpation" of the land "by a people disagreeable to God." In this way, Malaterra seems to argue that both aspects of Roger's motivation were virtuous. At the same time, this betrays a certain insecurity. Malaterra feels compelled to speak on Roger's impetus for conquest as if they might be attacked in some way; it is as if he expects a critic of Roger to say, "The Count *only* invaded Sicily so that he could loot and pillage." As such, it seems that there might have been something shameful or delegitimizing about conquest for conquest's sake.

⁶⁵ Though, as Section 3a will examine further, the *Deeds* is filled with subtile critiques of Roger and his reign.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger*, trans. Kenneth Baxter Wolf (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.1: 85-86.

For Malaterra, as with the poet of *El Cid*, the presence of the religious *Other* in the story conveniently allows him to skate by any accusations of avarice or worldliness. The idolatry of the “infidels” on Sicily legitimizes Roger’s desire to not only capture the island but also reap worldly profits. But would this have been true to Roger’s actual motivations? As Norman Daniel notes, the Norman conquest “had little to do with religion in the first place, and religion was never more than a political and military factor in the Sicilian situation.”⁶⁷ It seems that this religious element was really a *post hoc* justification of the violence and plunder of the Norman conquest. Quite literally, the *Deeds*, is a history written by the victor; with the Muslims of Sicily subjugated under Norman rule, Malaterra has the *positional* means and *situational* interest in playing up their religious alterity.

Chapter 1 showed how religious alterity could be used to justify a group’s rule; this chapter has shown how it could be used to justify a ruler’s *actions*, particularly ones that might have been morally repugnant if done to other Christians. The “use” of Islam in these cases is to explain away actions that may seem to reflect poorly upon the heroes of these texts by employing the fact of Islamic alterity. As it is, the drive to self-justify in this way reflects a certain point of insecurity *within* the Christian world: reconciling the realities of pillage and conquest (and how they might reflect upon certain Christian heroes) with the anti-materialistic, pacifistic ideals of Christianity. By opportunistically accentuating or ignoring religious difference, the poet of *El Cid* and Geoffrey Malaterra are able to preserve – and even augment – the virtue of their respective heroes.

⁶⁷ Norman Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, 124.

Chapter 3: The Saracen as Rhetorical Device

...*Orientalism* is – and does not simply represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with “our” world. (Said, 1979, 12.)

Said’s analysis of *Orientalism* is, in large part, focused on how the West’s manufactured image of the Orient is tailored to suit Occidental ends. Rather than a mere explanation of the realities of cultural and geographic distinction, *Orientalism* takes the form of a “series of ‘interests’” which the West “not only creates but also maintains.”⁶⁸ Such “interests,” however, need not pertain directly to the Orient (or Oriental subject) itself; Western understandings of the Oriental *Other* may be tailored towards issues within the West – “our world,” the *One* to the *Other* – rather than outside it. In this case, where a fully-fledged “Western” identity does not exist for Said’s analysis to be mapped onto, we are speaking of issues within Christendom. Because Muslims were the Oriental subject, distinct from the hegemonic religious culture, their depiction, political treatment, and popular understanding were subject to Orientalist alteration by differing (and even conflicting) Christian interests. This phenomenon is illustrated in *The Chronicle of Falco of Benevento*, *The Deeds of Count Roger*, *Inferno*, and Pietro Della Vigna’s “Invective against the Pope.” In the texts, Muslims were used as a rhetorical device in political disputes that did not directly concern Muslims or Islam in general; rather, they could indicate a kind of guilt by association, as in Falco’s *Chronicle* and *Inferno*, provide a point of comparison to highlight an enemy’s own evils, as in Della Vigna’s invective, or be used to illustrate another’s cruelty, as in *The Deeds of Count Roger*.

⁶⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

3a: The Sympathetic Muslim in *The Deeds of Count Roger*

Geoffrey Malaterra's *The Deeds of Count Roger* provides two competing narratives of Norman conquest, one critical and one propagandistic. In the last chapter, I focused on the former, which esteemed the Norman rulers, validated their rule, and reviled their enemies. For the primary audiences of these texts, which were generally the patrons of their respective authors or royal courts, such a characterization is entirely appropriate. They are self-validating, triumphalist narratives which portray the Norman conquerors as divinely ordained rulers and cunning tacticians. As some scholars have noted however, some of these texts contain references and literary elements which suggest that they were intended to be read differently by another kind of audience. Reading between the lines of the text, with particular attention to the classical allusions and scholarly concepts that appear throughout,⁶⁹ the educated readers – generally other monks, like the writers of these works – would intuit an entirely different meaning in their analysis of these histories. According to Kenneth Baxter Wolf, writers like Geoffrey Malaterra, “far from silencing his ‘monastic voice,’ simply disguised it.”⁷⁰ Rather than simply extolling their patrons and vindicating Norman rule, writers like Malaterra imbedded subtle critiques of the violence of Norman rule and conquest into their works which only a particularly educated audience could perceive. As stated earlier, little is known about Malaterra as an individual, but this hidden critique suggests a certain disdain for the brutality of the Normans, and perhaps a dissatisfaction with Norman rule. Because these texts are predicated upon this dual narrative, it is

⁶⁹ Scholars such as Kenneth Baxter Wolf and Emily Albu have argued that both the moral philosophies of Christian writers like Augustine and the historiographical methods of classical writers like Sallust have pronounced influences on the literary production of writers like Geoffrey Malaterra. In fact, Malaterra outright quotes Sallust throughout *The Deeds of Count Roger*. (Wolf, “Introduction” in *The Deeds of Count Roger*, 30) It is important to note that these authors are not seeking to fully discredit Norman rule as a whole, but rather to single out some of their unjust practices, or air grievances about their governance. See Wolf, “Introduction,” in *The Deeds of Count Roger*, 29, and Albu, *The Normans and their Histories The Normans and Their Histories: Propaganda, Myth, and Subversion*, 6.

⁷⁰ Wolf, “Introduction,” in *The Deeds of Count Roger*, 30.

appropriate to analyze them both as Norman propaganda and a critique of Norman conquest. In this section, I will approach *The Deeds of Count Roger* as the latter.

Malaterra's implicit critique of the Normans, couched in the language of praise, focuses on their rapaciousness, use of violence, and materialistic nature:

Count Roger, intent on acquiring Sicily, was impatient with any inactivity. Campaigning in all directions, he struck terror with his frequent attacks... the Count dominated the greater part of Sicily. This was an inborn trait of the sons of Tancred: they were always avid for Domination. When they were in a position of power, they suffered no one to have lands or possessions near their own without being jealous of them, so that either they would take possession of everything for themselves or they would immediately make their neighbors serve them as their subjects.⁷¹

Malaterra intended to flatter his patron in *The Deeds*,⁷² and when read by the victorious Norman conqueror, the text above may appear self-justifying. It suggests that Count Roger and the Normans in general naturally possessed of a drive and capability to conquer; this is the “inborn trait,” which Malaterra refers to as the *aviditas dominationis*.⁷³ This in turn may imply that Normans are divinely favored, or that they deserve to rule. However, reading this as a dispassionate and educated monk, one might instead see the criticism of Norman conquest, particularly in the emphasis on the Norman's uncontrollable and jealous urge to plunder and dominate. The concept of the *aviditas dominationis* that Malaterra attributes to the Normans is analogous the Sallustian concept of *libido dominandi*, and a monastic reader familiar with Sallust and his works would make this connection and know that such a quality carries negative connotations.⁷⁴

In the conquest of Sicily, much of the Count Roger's violence is directed against the Sicilian Muslims, meaning that, in the critical reading of the *Deeds of Count Roger*, Muslims

⁷¹ Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger* 2.38, 116.

⁷² Albu, *The Normans and Their Histories*, 111.

⁷³ Wolf, *Making History: The Normans and Their Historians in Eleventh-Century Italy*, 33.

⁷⁴ Wolf, “Introduction” in *The Deeds of Count Roger*, 30.

become a vector through which to criticize Roger's conquest. It should be noted that the violence suffered by Muslims is not necessarily a cause for sympathy in this reading of the text, but rather a means by which to draw attention to the depravity of the violence itself. One of the most striking moments in the text is a brief tangent Malaterra includes in his narration of Roger's conquest of Messina, a Sicilian port city just across the Messina Strait from the Italian Mainland. Roger, realizing that the Sicilian armies will put up a strong fight, turns to subversion to win the battle. Referencing Prudentius' classical poem *Pycomachia*, Malaterra claims Roger conjured up his plan "as if he had read 'What difference does it make whether the palm of victory is obtained through the use of arms or by resorting to trickery?'"⁷⁵ As the Normans storm the fortress, "killing all those he found within,"⁷⁶ Malaterra interrupts the story of the conquest with a short tale, almost certainly fabricated, about two fleeing Sicilian youths:

*Among those who tried to flee was a certain youth, one of the most noble among the citizens of Messina, who had a very beautiful sister whom he tried to take with him as he fled. But the girl... began to lose heart out of fear and the unaccustomed difficulty of the course. The brother tenderly encouraged her to flee, but when he saw that she was physically exhausted, fell upon her with his own sword and killed her so that she would not have to live among the Normans and be corrupted by any of them... he chose to become her murderer and to mourn her death rather than to have her become a prevaricator of their law and be defiled by someone who did not live according to it.*⁷⁷

To the royal or uneducated audience, this story simply serves a literary function rather than a historical or even propagandistic one. With *The Deeds* being read in courts, discursive segments such as this were intended to heighten the drama of the work. As Wolf notes, "The romance of the image [of the Saracen siblings] presumably appealed to the sensibilities of a courtly audience despite the fact that it reflected badly on the integrity of the Normans and their mission."⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger*, 2.10, 90. Classical reference noted by Wolf in footnotes.

⁷⁶ Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger*, 2.10, 91.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.11, 91.

⁷⁸ Wolf, "Introduction," in *The Deeds of Count Roger*, 25.

Roger's capacity for employing subversive military strategies is just another example of his tactical acumen.

Alternatively, the story's negative implications about the "integrity of the Normans and their mission," paired with the description of Roger's treacherousness that immediately precedes it, takes on a whole new character when read in Malaterra's monastic voice. Malaterra's choice to explain Roger's rationale for resorting to trickery by using a classical reference seems to signal to the educated reader that they should read this section in a Sallustian framework, meaning that they should approach it as a critique. Reading this story as a critique of Norman conquest, we see Malaterra bemoan Roger's uncompromising drive to domination. By juxtaposing Roger's unscrupulous tactics with the tale of the siblings, Malaterra seems to imply that the latter is a result of the former. The tragedy the noble young Sicilian endures is intended illustrate the horror of an amoral conquest.

This story is told with Muslims rather than the Lombards or Greeks that Roger conquers because of the religious and cultural gap that can explain the brother's actions; he kills out of fear of his sister being defiled by Normans and subjected to non-Islamic law. This instance of violence inflicted against Muslims is emphasized in the text not because Malaterra is particularly concerned about the wellbeing of Muslims, but rather because it serves as another way to highlight the problems with Roger's uncompromising quest for power. There were many victims in the course of the Norman conquests, but this literary tangent demonstrates another dimension of the cruelty. The tragic – but apocryphal – story of the Muslim siblings employs an *Orientalist* vision of Muslim culture in order to heighten the romantic drama and also provide further its plausibility; it could only be done with Muslims as the subject. In this way, Sicilian Islam is deployed by Malaterra to further his own critique.

3b: *The Chronicle of Falco of Benevento and Roger II's Saracen Soldiers*

Roger II (r. 1130-1154), son of Count Roger, embarked on a series of campaigns to expand his territorial holdings throughout the first half of the twelfth century. In the early 1120s, he was in control of not only Sicily, but also Apulia and portions of Calabria. Roger's growing power, along with his track record of being "not necessarily amenable to papal instructions," earned him the ire of the papacy; Pope Honorius II (r. 1124-1130) had him excommunicated several times, and attempted to string together a loose alliance of local barons and rival claimants to Norman rule in order to stave off Roger's advance.⁷⁹ Honorius' coalition, weak and internally-conflicted, was no match for Roger's regional power, and in 1127, Honorius himself invested Roger as Duke of Apulia.

After the death of Honorius in 1130, members of the College of Cardinals fell into disputes regarding who would inherit the papacy. Unable to reach a conclusion, two Popes, Innocent II and Anacletus II, were selected by rival parties within the Church. This papal schism precipitated a civil war, with Anacletus siding with Roger – and declaring him King of Sicily via Papal Bull in 1130 – and Innocent seeking support in Roger's enemies, such as Count Rainulf of Caiazzo (d. 1139). One town that fell in the midst of these conflicts was Benevento, a former papal holding. Benevento was replete with partisan tensions, passing ownership between coalitions of either the pro-Innocent faction and the pro-Honorius (and thereby pro-Roger) faction.

Falco of Benevento, a judge and notary from the town of Benevento, and a staunch pro-Innocent partisan, constructed a chronicle of the region spanning from 1101-1144 that focused

⁷⁹ Graham Loud, "History Writing in Sicily," in *Chronicling History: Chroniclers and Historians in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Sharon Dale, Alison W. Lewin, and Duane J. Osheim (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 36-37.

primarily on the town of Benevento. The text⁸⁰ is written as year-by-year annals of the city, with the events leading up to 1127 being a patchwork of older histories interspersed with some of Falco's own additions, and the subsequent years being added in iterative installments.⁸¹ Falco and his faction believed that Roger's ascendance would be a great threat to the independence of Benevento. Accordingly, a recurrent theme of the text is the particular evil of Roger himself; the reader is constantly reminded of his cruelty, treacherousness, and heresy. One of Falco's primary means of communicating these qualities is highlighting the fact that Roger's victims and enemies are Christians. Describing Roger's 1133 campaign in Apulia, Falco writes "We testify to the Eternal King that he demonstrated such cruelty toward Christian people as has scarcely or ever been head of in our century."⁸² This mournful passage – which, like other phrases Falco wishes to enunciate, is repeated again later in the section – implies that Roger is not just a political rival, but an enemy of Christendom. In the context of hyper-religious society such as 12th century Italy, this is a particularly powerful line of rhetorical attack.

The *Chronicle's* argument that Roger is an enemy of the faith is not just negatively informed by Roger's war with the "true" pope; at one point, it is also positively derived from his proximity to Sicilian Islam. When the war comes to Benevento in 1132, Falco indicts Roger in this way Roger by pointing out his use of Saracen soldiers. As Roger's troops pull back in a retreat, Rao De Fragneto, an auxiliary of Prince Robert,⁸³ captures several of the "Saracens" (explicitly referred to as such). Once the battle was over:

He ordered that one of them should have his head cut off, and sent to [Prince Robert] as a mark of triumph. The prince ordered the head to be sent to Capua, there to enhance his reputation. Hearing of the disaster and the captivity of his Saracens, [King

⁸⁰ The original chronicle is lost to us now, but exists in the later *Chronicle of Sta. Maria di Ferraria*.

⁸¹ Loud, "History Writing in Sicily," 36-37.

⁸² Falco of Benevento, "The Chronicle of Falco of Benevento," in *Roger II and the Creation of the Kingdom of Sicily*, ed. and trans. Graham Loud, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 204.

⁸³ Robert II of Capua, ally of Pope Innocent, commissioned to lead the fight against Roger in Benevento.

Roger II] lamented long and hard; moved by his grief he threatened that when a time came for revenge he would exact payment for what had happened.⁸⁴

In the following battle, King Roger, driven to action by this grief, seems to acquire an upper hand, however:

But Divine Providence which never fails to dispose matters looked down from on high on the side of righteousness, or so it appeared to us in our weakness. For Count Rainulf, who was positioned on the other side, and his squadron of 500 knights, seeing that the battle was being lost, spurred their horses and furiously charged the king... They poured into the midst of the combatants and, with the help of God, the king was defeated and forced to flee.⁸⁵

In Falco's presentation of this story, we see this conflict framed in religious terms rather than political. Robert and Rainulf (and thereby Innocent and Falco) are cast as soldiers of God, the executors of "Divine Providence." Roger, on the other hand, is understood to be resisting divine will, instead acting on a grief-driven rage brought about by the capture of "his" Saracens. Falco's intent is not to present an anti-Islamic polemic per se, but rather to use Roger's purported devotion to his Saracen allies (in the course of a war against the "true" Christians, followers of Pope Innocent) to further drive a wedge between Roger and Christendom. Roger's war against the "true" Christians is prosecuted using non-Christians; this, for Falco, helps make his case that Roger is an enemy of Christendom and that the pope he aligns with is illegitimate.

In *Norman Kings of Sicily and The Rise of the Anti-Islamic Critique*, Joshua Birk argues that Falco did not rhetorically employ Roger's connections to Sicilian Islam as an attack against him; the limited mention of the Saracens troops in Roger's armies, instead, betrays an indifference towards religious alterity, at least when it comes to assembling armies.⁸⁶ While it is

⁸⁴ Falco of Benevento, "The Chronicle of Falco of Benevento," 196.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁸⁶ Joshua C. Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily and the Rise of the Anti-Islamic Critique: Baptized Sultans* (Northampton: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 113.

true that Falco's chronicle only refers to "Saracens" in this specific story,⁸⁷ the way the chronicle was written and the particularities of this instance in the text suggest that there may very well have been a rhetorical spin in his mention of Muslims. To start, the iterative and cobbled nature of the text opens it up to the possibility of inconsistency. Across the writing of the chronicle the political circumstances facing Benevento changed, and as Falco sat to write another entry in the annals over the years, so too did his outlook and slant; his hatred of Roger II and Anacletus grew as the years wore on, and his once-lukewarm opinions of figures like Rainulf turned into a high praise.⁸⁸ Similarly, the fact that the *Chronicle* is not consistently polemical need not preclude this one instance from being rooted in anti-Islamic sentiment.

Furthermore, it is the singularity of this usage of the term "Saracen" that makes this moment in the text stand out. Rather than ask why Falco does not highlight religious difference throughout the *Chronicle*, we must instead ask why he chooses to do so *now*. Previously, there may not have been no need to make a distinction between the different components of Roger's army. In 1132, however, with Roger's army engaging in battle against Benevento, those distinctions were readily apparent; anyone who bore witness to the battles would know the diversity of Roger's armies. When the Muslims of Roger's armies are far away, not posing a direct threat as Roger's soldiers, they are simply "Sicilians," but as they advance on Benevento, they suddenly become defined by their religious difference. Their religious alterity matters when they are present fighting for the ally of the false Pope against the "true Christians" that follow Pope Innocent. King Roger, then, through his devotion to his troops, is implicated by proxy; it is, for Falco, another "strike" against Roger.

⁸⁷Any other mention of these Muslim soldiers in Falco's Chronicle refers to them as "Sicilians," highlighting geographical difference instead of religious. See Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily and the Rise of the Anti-Islamic Critique: Baptized Sultans*, 111.

⁸⁸ Loud, "History Writing in Sicily." 38.

At this point in the *Chronicle*, the Saracens stand in for Roger himself. Birk notes that Falco uses Roger's "Saracen's" as "a symbol of his [Roger's] ambitions to elevate himself above the rest of Southern Italian nobility and exert control over the region."⁸⁹ Accordingly, Rao de Fragneto's violence against the Saracens serves as a symbolic repudiation of Roger himself. Birk argues that this is another reason why Falco is not employing anti-Islamic rhetoric to critique Roger – Falco is only using Saracens as a stand-in for Roger himself. However, by associating the Saracens with King Roger, he is also associating King Roger with Saracens (hence Roger's extreme grief at the loss of "his" Saracens.) Roger's expansionist campaigns, because of their use of Muslim soldiers, are defined by an anti-Christian character.

Perhaps Falco would have expected the connection between Roger's anti-Christian character and Islamic religious alterity to be obvious at this moment in the *Chronicle*, as Saracens attempt to wrest the former Papal stronghold of Benevento from the true believers. In general, Falco's *Chronicle* is hardly concerned with the sectarian divide between Christians and Muslims. For the most part, this work is the story of an Italian town, and the story of a civil war on the Italian mainland. The antagonisms therein are almost entirely intrareligious, posing a "true" Christian side staving off the rise of a pretender and a merciless tyrant (Anacletus and Roger, respectively). Falco's employing of an anti-Islamic critique against Roger, then, is entirely in keeping with the rest of the text; the banality of it – the fact that it is only passingly employed once, without explicit use of polemical language – is itself striking. Roger's association with Saracens is just one more in a long list of reasons that he is an enemy of the true faith.

⁸⁹ Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily and the Rise of the Anti-Islamic Critique: Baptized Sultans*, 111.

3c: Frederick II's Feuds with the Papacy - *Inferno* and Invective

Roger II was not the only ruler of Sicily to have troubled relationships with the papacy. Though the Normans established several tenuous alliances with the Church over the centuries, there was a general sense of uneasiness and animus between the two. For the Church, the legitimacy of which rested upon religious justification, these conflicts were described in religious terms. As Norman conquerors made their way south through Italy throughout the 11th century, Pope Leo IX (r. 1049-1054), in a letter to the Byzantine emperor, described the raiders as “an undisciplined and alien people” who “rise up in every direction against the church of God with more than pagan impiety.”⁹⁰ It is no surprise that Holy Roman Emperor and King of Sicily Frederick II (r. 1120-1250), grandson of King Roger II of Sicily, incurred similar insults and accusations of heresy from the papacy. Distinct from the accusations against his ancestors, however, was the fact that many of the attacks against Frederick’s piety were thoroughly rooted in anti-Islamic polemic rather than the more general notions of pagan impiety Leo IX referred to.⁹¹

Pope Innocent IV (r. 1245-1254), in a 1245 papal bull, condemned Frederick and called for his deposition; Innocent justified his declaration with the claim that Frederick “joined together with Saracens by detestable friendship,” and that he “cherishe[d] their religious rights.”⁹² This line of attack, employed not only by Innocent but also his predecessors, is peculiar for two reasons. First, Frederick’s conflicts with the papacy were not directly related to Muslims, but rather were political, military, and territorial disputes. The Holy Roman Empire had been at odds with the papacy for centuries, clashing about issues such as investitures and Italian partisan

⁹⁰ Wolf, *Making History: The Normans and Their Historians in Eleventh-Century Italy*, 48-49.

⁹¹ Birk, *Norman Kings of Sicily and the Rise of the Anti-Islamic Critique: Baptized Sultans*. 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1.

squabbles. In fact, the notorious conflict between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, partisan factions which supported the papacy and the empire respectively,⁹³ colored much of the larger conflict between Frederick and the Popes. Second, Frederick's predecessors had themselves employed Muslim scholars, soldiers, and diplomats, yet never received the same anti-Islamic polemics that Frederick did. The general treatment of Muslims under Frederick's reign was informed by a sense of pragmatism – toleration, but not acceptance – which he inherited from his predecessors.⁹⁴ To be clear, Frederick did possess a particular reputation for incorporating aspects of the pre-existing Sicilian Muslim culture and political structure more so than his predecessors (in this way, he resembles Alfonso X of Castile and León). A number of diverse influences constituted the intellectual components of his rule. His court was “officially Christian and intuitively Arabic” owing to his eminent fascination with Arab poetry, science, and culture.⁹⁵ At the same time, he “presided over the virtual extinction of Sicilian Islam” through deportations, conversions, pogroms, and gradual assimilation.⁹⁶ The entire Muslim population of Sicily was deported to Lucera, a colony in Southern Italy, where Frederick would go on to spend a great deal of his time. Frederick undeniably possessed a fascination with Arab culture, but his subjugation of Muslims would seem to be in keeping with the papacy's supposed anti-Islamic ideals; the attacks levied against him, then, were more opportunistic political ploys than they were genuine condemnations of a perceived Muslim heresy.⁹⁷ Frederick and his court came to be

⁹³ “Giovanni Villani on the Origins of the Guelfs and Ghibellines in Florence,” in *Medieval Italy: Texts in Translation*, ed. by Jansen, K.L., Joanna Drell, and Frances Andrews (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 130.

⁹⁴ David Abulafia, “The End of Norman Sicily,” in *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen*, ed. by William Tronza. (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1994), 213.

⁹⁵ Karla Mallette, “Poetries of the Norman Courts” In *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, ed. by María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 378-9.

⁹⁶ Abulafia, “The End of Norman Sicily,” 215-6.

⁹⁷ It is worth noting that Frederick's deportation of Sicilian Muslims to Lucera was not religiously motivated, but rather a response his own political and economic needs on the Island; while not necessarily relevant to the conflict between himself and the papacy, it is another instance of *situation* dictating the treatment of Muslims. (James. M.

understood within wider notions of heresy, including an association with classical Epicureanism, because of their “reputation for luxury, intemperance, familiarity with Eastern ways, and association with Saracens.”⁹⁸

The papacy’s position – that Frederick is a heretic – is embodied in Frederick II and his associate’s respective damnations in the *Inferno*. Deep into Hell, in the infernal city of Dis, the Pilgrim⁹⁹ finds Frederick burning eternally in an infernal sepulcher.¹⁰⁰ Frederick is condemned alongside the heretics, who not only deny but also subvert the truth of God’s spiritual order. The heretics of Canto X are, in large part, Epicureans, who deny the immortality of the soul, making Frederick’s placement in this cohort is puzzling. It is unlikely that Dante, educated and politically engaged, seriously believed Frederick to have been an Epicurean heretic. Dante was, however, a member of the Guelph faction, who stood in opposition to the Holy Roman Emperor; it is more likely that Dante took advantage of the reputation of Frederick’s cross-cultural court and intellectual influences in order to justify placing his political enemy in Hell (and a particularly despairing pit of Hell at that). Another relevant example of the partisan lean of *Inferno* is illustrated in the same Canto. The principle damned soul of this circle of hell that Dante speaks to is Farinata degli Uberti (1212-1264), a Ghibelline who scored a particularly devastating military victory against the Guelphs at Montaperti in 1260.¹⁰¹ Farinata himself possessed no immediate reputation of being a heretic, but years after his death was condemned as

Powell, “The Papacy and the Muslim Frontier,” in *Muslims Under Latin Rule, 1100-1300*, ed. James M. Powell. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 195.

⁹⁸ Joanna H. Drell, “Using Dante to Teach the Middle Ages: Examples from Medieval Southern Italian History,” in *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* (2012), 62.

⁹⁹ The *Commedia*, while a work of fiction, is presented as a first-person narrative from the perspective of Dante himself. In this essay, I will use the name “Dante” to refer to historical figure and author of them, and the title “Pilgrim” to refer to Dante’s narrative character.

¹⁰⁰ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Volume 1: Inferno*, trans. Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Classics, 1984), Canto X.118-20, 162.

¹⁰¹ Mark Musa, *Inferno*, notes 166.

one by papal decree for his allegiance to the Holy Roman Empire in 1283.¹⁰² It is his faction's animus to the papacy and allegiance to the Empire that makes him a heretic rather than his actual spiritual beliefs or practices.

Dante's rationale for condemning Frederick is applied to his allies as well. Another denizen of Hell closely associated with Frederick is his trusted translator and scientist Michael Scot (1175-1232), who with his fellow fortune tellers and diviners, marches eternally through the eighth circle of hell with his head skewed to face behind him and his eyes blinded by his tears.¹⁰³ Scot served on Frederick's court and possessed a reputation for being "a magician and augur";¹⁰⁴ in the *Inferno*, Dante proclaims that Scot "knew every trick of magic and fraudulence."¹⁰⁵ Scot's association with mysticism or occult practice was clearly well-known, as he is described in Boccaccio's *Decameron* as "a renowned expert in necromancy."¹⁰⁶ Such a reputation, however, is neither an accurate representation of his work nor his legacy. Scot's most important and enduring contributions were his translations of a number Arabic and Greek scientific and philosophical texts (including those of Averroes, whom Dante placed alongside the noble pagans of antiquity). Dante's characterization of Scot is based on "a series of alchemical and magical works which may or may not have been his."¹⁰⁷ As Thomas Burman argues, however, Dante, being educated and familiar with many such Arabic translations and their cultural and intellectual sway, would not have simply written Scot off as a magician, but would instead have been very aware of his place in the Arab-Aristotelian intellectual movement.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² John Ciardi. *The Divine Comedy: Inferno* (New York: New American Library, 2003), notes, 87.

¹⁰³ Mark Musa. *Inferno*, Canto XX.9-15, 251.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, notes 258.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, XX.118, 251.

¹⁰⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (New York: Signet Classics, 2010), 621-22.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas E. Burman, "Michael Scott and the Translators," In *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, 407.

¹⁰⁸ Burman, "Michael Scot and the Translators," 410.

The Arab-Aristotelian tradition was, at once, vital to figures of esteem for Dante, such as Aquinas, but also “dangerous,” as religious authorities saw it as “undermining Christian teachings” and “a corrosive solvent that might destroy Christian society.”¹⁰⁹ If figures such as Aquinas could be forgiven for their incorporation of both pagan and Muslim philosophy and science into their own writing, then Scot was unable to escape this condemnation because of his particular association with Frederick II’s court. The political nature of Dante’s eschatology in *Inferno* allows him to opportunistically seize upon tenuous claims and rumors – such as Frederick’s heresy and Scot’s supposed alchemy – which, in turn, are rooted in an association with Muslim culture, science, and society, in order to damn political enemies. In short, the justifications for Frederick and his allies’ respective punishments are predicated upon pro-papal narratives which were themselves derived, in large part, from Frederick’s relationship to Muslims in Sicily.

Pietro Della Vigna (1190-1249), advisor and eventual chancellor in the court of Frederick II,¹¹⁰ reversed the papacy’s anti-Islamic critique, drawing on the same feelings of anti-Muslim antipathy to rhetorically attack pope Gregory IX (r. 1198-1241). Frederick’s conflicts with Gregory IX specifically related to Frederick’s performance in the sixth crusade, the Pope’s excommunication of Frederick, and the Pope’s fears of Frederick’s political dominance. Della Vigna’s invective against the Pope, contained in a letter to the prelates of the Church, features of number of general attacks on the Pope, primarily targeting his faith, theology, and Christian virtue. According to Pietro, Gregory “sits on a throne of perverse dogma, a Pharisee anointed before his accomplices with the oil of iniquity... he is the Antichrist, whose forerunners [the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 410.

¹¹⁰ Editor’s preface to “Piero Della Vigna’s Invective Against the Pope.” In *Medieval Italy: Texts in Translation*. 286.

previous popes] said we were.”¹¹¹ Gregory is associated with the apocalyptic, surreptitious, spiritual enemy foretold in Revelation, and juxtaposed with the authenticity, purity, and perfection of Christ. Della Vigna’s juxtaposition is continued with an example of Frederick’s own faith and that of Islam:

*But we [Frederick II and his allies] openly acknowledge the only Son of God, coeternal and one with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, our Lord Jesus Christ, begotten from the beginning and before the world began... [Christ’s body] rose up from the dead after three days. We are told that the body of Mohammad, however, hangs suspended in the air, besieged by demons, and his soul has been delivered up to the torments of hell. His works were dark and against the law on high.*¹¹²

Why is Islam invoked in this discussion, seemingly at random? This is an attack on the papacy, supposedly the core of Christendom, not the enemy in the east. The comparatively brief mention of Islam in this larger letter, however, indicates the rhetorical power the religious antagonist carried in the Christian mind. First, this letter is “written in Frederick’s voice,”¹¹³ so there is a clear distinction throughout between “we” – Frederick, Della Vigna, etc. – and everyone else, who is defined in opposition to them. As the papacy exists in opposition to Frederick, so too does Mohammad and the Muslim practice; Della Vigna would like the reader to see the papacy and the Islamic faith as parts of the same sinister, anti-Christian project. More still, his decision to refer to Gregory as the “antichrist,” in light of the alignment with Islam he imputes onto the papacy, hearkens to a popular association of Mohammad with the antichrist and/or the apocalypse. Innocent III, the Pope before Gregory’s own predecessor, had referred to Mohammad as “the beast” described in the book of Revelation.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Pietro Della Vigna, “Petri di Veneis iudicis aulici et cancellarii Frederici II. Imp. Epistolarum quibus res gestae ejusdem imperatori aliaque multa ad historiam ac jurisprudentiam spectantia continentur libri VI. Novam hanc editionem adjectis variis lectionibus.” In *Medieval Italy: Texts in Translation*. 286.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 287.

¹¹³ Editor’s preface to “Piero Della Vigna’s Invective Against the Pope,” 286.

¹¹⁴ Innocent III, “Quia Major,” In *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* by John Tolan, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 194.

Della Vigna also makes a reference to Mohammad's suspended tomb, another popular Christian rumor. Several myths such as this were created in polemical biographies of Mohammad (which range from incineration to dismemberment, but generally result in the defilement of his corpse) in order to debase, exoticize, and discredit him and, by extension, the Islamic faith.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the otherworldliness of this burial creates a distance between Mohammad and Christian cultural practice. This association of the papacy with Islam, coupled with an underscoring of the perfidy and heresy of Islam, allows Della Vigna to contend that the Pope is not simply presenting a deviant or deficient form of Christianity, but rather fighting against the divine and realizing satanic machinations. It is particularly interesting that Della Vigna, speaking for Frederick, would employ an anti-Islamic polemic in this way, especially in light of Frederick's supposed admiration of Islamic scholarship and culture, and his time spent in Lucera. For Della Vigna, this was perhaps a necessary rhetorical tactic, one needed to distance Frederick from the papacy's own anti-Islamic critique. Regardless, it indicates the ease with which a purported "tolerator" and even admirer of Muslims could turn on them when it suited a specific political end.

Returning to Said, Della Vigna's ability to engage in this polemic on behalf of Frederick emphasizes both the *situationally* and *positionality* of this early form of *Orientalism*. Frederick is at once able to enjoy Islamic Culture, vacationing at Lucera or practicing Sicilian falconry, while also allowing his auxiliaries to engage in anti-Islamic polemic when it was advantageous. It is positional in this case because Frederick, who rules over Christians and Muslims alike, and is geographically situated near other Christian kingdoms, has nothing to lose in silencing Muslims and appealing to rumors about Islam he and his court would likely have known to be unfounded.

¹¹⁵ John Tolan, *Sons of Ishmael: Muslims Through European Eyes in the Middle Ages*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 21.

Across this chapter, we have seen the literary Saracen *situationally* deployed by various Christian authors to deride their coreligionists. For Falco, Dell Vigna, and the papacy, throwing barbs using the polemical image of Islam might have been an obvious rhetorical strategy. Bear in mind the antipathetic attitudes towards Muslims explored in Chapter 1; one can plainly see the danger of being associated with (or *thought to be* associated with) Saracen heresy and bloodlust. Malaterra's seemingly sympathetic use of the Saracen siblings seems to go in a different direction, but really reflects the same principles of *alterity*. A situationally malleable *Other* is convenient for Malaterra – where Saracens were otherwise an imposing threat for Count Roger to conquer, in the story of the siblings, they can be pathetic, exotic victims.

What does this rhetorical practice tell us about affairs within Christendom? To start, we see how intrareligious conflict was rationalized in a Mediterranean world filled with other competing faiths. Might there have been some discomfort with the fact that the Christian world was not united under divine will? Perhaps the presence of, or even interference of the religious *Other* might explain why Christians could not get along; at the very least, Muslim heresy could be a easily-communicated analogue used to label other Christians as heretics (as in the case of Della Vigna's invective). While Alfonso and Count Roger emphasized the *alterity* of Islam to bolster their own images and legitimacy, the authors that appeared in this chapter use it to defame and delegitimize their opponents.

Chapter 4: Tolerance, Toleration, and the Possibility of *Convivencia*

In *Ethnic Variety and its Implications: Frederick II's Relations with Jews and Muslims*, David Abulafia describes Frederick's approach towards religious difference as a matter of "toleration (rather than tolerance)."¹¹⁶ As one might expect, a policy of *toleration* simply allows members of "out" groups to exist and engage in religious or cultural practice, generally to suit a pragmatic, situational end. This, of course, does not exclude acts persecution or attitudes of indignance. On the other hand, actual *tolerance* implies acceptance of alterity without an exterior motive. This distinction is crucial to understanding some of more progressive attitudes towards religious difference in the contemporary literature. In this chapter, I will examine instances of apparent tolerance in *Inferno*, *El Cid*, and *The Decameron*, situating them in their historical or intellectual contexts. These texts, respectively, constitute a spectrum of attitudes towards religious difference from mild toleration to early forms of actual tolerance. These limited appearances of tolerance are instrumental, predicated upon broader social circumstance rather than a value for tolerance itself. At the same time, *El Cid*, and to a greater extent, *The Decameron*, show how policies of toleration might connect to meaningful forms of tolerance, or at least ambivalence towards religious difference.

4a: The Muslims of *Inferno*

In the previous chapter, I examined the ways broader political intrigue and anti-Islamic rhetoric influenced Dante's treatment of Frederick II and his associates in *Inferno*. Where that chapter focused on Dante's rhetorical use of Islam against Christians, this chapter addresses Dante's direct references to Islam in the *Commedia*. Of course, the few Muslims in the

¹¹⁶ David Abulafia, "Ethnic Variety and its Implications: Frederick II's Relations with Jews and Muslims" in *Intellectual Life at the Court of Frederick II Hohenstaufen*, ed. William Tronza (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1994), 213.

Commedia are all found in *Inferno*, indicating that clearly Dante was not advocating for religious tolerance. At the same time, Dante's treatment of certain Muslims in the *Inferno* suggests a particular admiration for aspects of Islamic culture. Dante navigates a tenuous and often self-contradictory toleration for the intellectual and cultural achievements of the Islam and the Muslim world.

Five Muslims are condemned for eternity in the *Inferno*, with three languishing in Limbo and two suffering in the Ninth Bolgia of Hell. I will start by examining the latter two. The Ninth Bolgia, part of the wider section of Hell which hosts the fraudulent, is reserved for the schismatics, those who intentionally sowed discord within the faith. Those residing in this circle are repeatedly cleft in two and subsequently reformed, reflecting the division they caused in life; this *contrapasso*¹¹⁷ is one of the most violent and lurid in all the *Inferno*. Among the damned here are the Prophet Mohammad, “deformed and torn,” and his stepson, Ali.¹¹⁸ If Frederick II was condemned as a heretic in Canto X, it would be consistent that Mohammad, then, suffers more intensely in a deeper pit of Hell reserved for those who not only practiced but encouraged deviation from religious orthodoxy.¹¹⁹ That Mohammad receives such a treatment in *Inferno* should be no surprise. *Inferno* is a deeply religious imagining of the afterlife and, as such, it upholds the medieval Christian belief that a profession of faith in Christ is an absolute necessity for ascension into Heaven. To practice any other religion, particularly one which is seen as an apocalyptic threat to Christendom, is cause for damnation and torment. This outright vilification of Islam is built into the physical architecture of Hell. The skyline of the City of Dis – the

¹¹⁷ Dante's technique of assigning punishments that reflect the specific sins of the damned

¹¹⁸ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Volume 1: Inferno*, Canto XXVIII.31, 326.

¹¹⁹ As Mark Musa notes, Mohammad's placement with the schismatics also reflects a medieval belief that the founding of Islam was a moment of schism within the Christian Church (as opposed to an independent religious movement). Some of Dante's contemporaries even believed that Mohammad was originally a cardinal in the Catholic Church. (Mark Musa, *Inferno*, notes 331.). As such, Islam can be seen as both “heresy” and a type of deviant “schism” in *Inferno*.

infernal city which surrounds the lower reaches of Hell – is constituted by countless mosques, which emanate the fiery red glow that illuminates the underworld.¹²⁰ As Maria Menocal notes, these are *actual* mosques, “not *like* mosques.”¹²¹ It is no coincidence, then, that the ramparts of Dis are the beginning of the Circle of Heretics.¹²² That mosques constitute much of the architecture of God’s carefully designed and eternal underworld suggests that Islam is *of* Hell, and its practice is an affront to God. There are obvious polemical implications in Mohammad’s damnation (by framing Islam’s founder as a fraudulent schismatic, Islam is implied to be false and heretical) and the mosques of Dis, but they provide a fascinating counterpoint to the treatment of the other three Muslims in the text.

In the First Circle of Hell, Limbo, the Pilgrim finds the Noble Pagans, who were virtuous in life, yet never professed the Christian faith. Though they do not endure the same physical torments of those damned to the circles below, they are cursed to exist eternally with a longing for God that can never be fulfilled. For Dante, Limbo is a way to pay respect to certain praiseworthy people or characters that simply happened to not be Christian. As such, this circle is mostly filled with figures from Greek and Roman antiquity (most of whom died well before the Birth of Christ), primarily scholars, historical figures, poets (including Vergil, the Pilgrim’s guide through hell), and mythological characters. Three stick out from this assortment, however: the Sultan of Egypt and Syria, Saladin, and the renowned Arab scholars Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroës (1126-1198).

Unlike the rest of the denizens of Limbo, who were mostly pagans, these three had been Muslims in life. Dante’s inclusion of these figures in Limbo provides an apparent contradiction

¹²⁰ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Volume 1: Inferno*, Canto VIII.71-2, 140.

¹²¹ Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1987) 128.

¹²² Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. 128.

to the logic of his treatments of Mohammad, Ali, and Frederick II. In those sections, association with Islam (indirectly, in the case of Frederick and his compatriots) was enough to merit not only damnation, but a particularly gruesome punishment. Placement in Limbo, however, is closer to an honor than any kind of condemnation; it seems that, in spite of their heretical (or schismatic) religious practices, Dante holds the Muslim inhabitants of this circle in high esteem. The coexistence of these two competing logics regarding Islam is an illustration of the *Dual Image* concept. At once, the Islamic faith and its practitioners are vilified for their heresy, but some Muslims are also celebrated for their achievements in the world (even if they advanced Islamic causes and conquered Christians).

Why might Dante have chosen to place these three figures in this circle? Certainly, Dante did not necessarily condemn every historical figure or literary character that he “damned” in *Inferno*. Some of the damned, such as Pietro Della Vigna, are objects of pity or sympathy rather than revulsion.¹²³ It would not be inconsistent for Dante to damn a figure such as Saladin while still praising his nobility; as such, his choice to spare these three Muslims from the true terrors of Hell betrays some kind of admiration, or a necessary acknowledgement of the successes of the Muslim world.

To properly contextualize Dante’s choice to “spare” these three, one must look to Dante’s educational background. Though the specifics of his education are not certain, his family background, and the sheer fact that he could produce a work such as the *Commedia*, suggest a refined cultural and literary education. On its own, the catalogue of figures from antiquity that appear in the *Commedia* reveal a substantial familiarity with the classical tradition. These

¹²³ Della Vigna, who wrote the Invective discussed last chapter, was accused of betraying Frederick II and subsequently thrown in prison, where he ended up committing suicide. Dante places Della Vigna in Hell along with the other suicides, but suggests that Della Vigna was falsely accused, and was driven to suicide from his grief of falling out of his lord’s favor. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Volume 1: Inferno*, Canto XIII. 84, 189.

connections are obvious, but modern scholarship has also revealed a potential link between the Muslim world and Dante's educational and cultural influences. To start, it was Arab scholars who preserved a great deal of the classical philosophy that was "rediscovered" by the West in the late Middle Ages. Furthermore, they expanded the classical philosophical tradition: Averroës' famous *Commentary* on Aristotle was translated under Frederick II, and was instrumental to the writings of Aquinas.¹²⁴ Indeed, in *Inferno*, Averroës is referred to as "Averroës of the Great Commentary."¹²⁵

Controversially, some scholars (starting with Spanish Scholar Miguel Asín Palacios) have claimed that there is a direct connection between the *Commedia* and the Islamic *Mi Rāj* tradition, arguing that the former is essentially a Christian version of the latter.¹²⁶ *Mi Rāj* narratives are retellings of the prophet Mohammad's tour of the various levels of Heaven during the Night Journey. The concepts and framings of the two stories possess undeniable parallels, being tiered explorations of the afterlife. In light of these thematic connections the presence of significant cultural exchange, it is likely that some degree of Islamic influence was indeed present in the *Commedia*.

The *Commedia* is, at once, rooted in strong Christian (and therefore anti-Islamic) ideology and colored by the influences of the Mediterranean-Islamic world. It seems likely that Dante would have had some awareness of this internal contradiction, and, as Maria Menocal argues, "such knowledge would have been a cause of some distress."¹²⁷ Perhaps, then, this internal contradiction is reflected in the *Commedia*'s narrative treatment of Islam: Islam, the

¹²⁴ Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. 121. And Mark Musa, *Inferno*, notes 108.

¹²⁵ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno*, Trans. John Ciardi. Canto IV, 144. 43..

¹²⁶ David R. Blanks, "Western Views of Islam in the Premodern Period: A Brief History of Past Approaches," in *Western Views of Islam in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Perception of Other*, ed. David R. Blanks and Michael Frassetto (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 15.

¹²⁷ Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History: A Forgotten Heritage*. 122.

faith, must be acknowledged as a great theological evil – hence the suffering of Mohammad and the infernal mosques of Dis – while the great successes of Islamic civilization – the chivalry of Saladin, the scholarship of Averroës and Avicenna – cannot be ignored. This attitude is a reflection of the same *Dual Image* concept alluded to earlier. In *Inferno*, Muslims might be noble warriors and scholars or heretics and pagans. Either way, they remain *Other*. For instance, Saladin, though catalogued along with the great military minds of Greece and Rome, is situated “off, by himself.”¹²⁸ Dante’s toleration of these figures is limited by the necessary acknowledgement of their *alterity*.

As David Blanks notes, it seems that the historiographical controversy over the Islamic-Influence theory has been “divided on nationalist lines,” with many Italian scholars reluctant to accept that Dante’s work was not “completely original.”¹²⁹ Writing in 1951, Leonardo Olschki, one such scholar, declared that “Aśin’s purpose to claim for Spain, even if Moorish, a considerable amount of Dante’s glory... induced [him] to overestimate his findings and to magnify his conclusions.”¹³⁰ Of course, the Italy of the 20th century was quite different from Dante’s Italy, but Olschki’s misgivings about the Islamic-Influence theory may reflect a modern iteration of Dante’s own ontological concerns about these influences. Olschki saw an ulterior motive in Aśin’s scholarship, an attempt to siphon Italian glory to Spain. That impulse to protect a kind of “purity” of influence is found in Dante’s own apparent balancing-act with his Arab influence.

Dante’s predicament might be indicative of a wider issue faced by Christians at this time; how does one reconcile the exclusivism of their religious system and the supposed superiority of

¹²⁸ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Volume 1: Inferno*, Canto IV.129, 101.

¹²⁹ David R. Blanks, “Western Views of Islam in the Premodern Period: A Brief History of Past Approaches,” 15.

¹³⁰ Leonardo Olschki, “Mohammedan Eschatology and Dante's Other World,” in *Comparative Literature* 3, no. 1 (1951): 1-2.

their culture with the successes and influence of the *Other*? It seems that, for many Christians in the heightened cross-cultural exchange of the Mediterranean world (and likely beyond), this was a source of a painful cognitive dissonance – one which was reconciled through *situational* renderings of the *Other*. Muslims could be understood as great scholars when discussing philosophy or science, but had to be ignoble heretics when the actual question of religious alterity was being addressed.

4b: Abengalbón, “Ideal Friend” of The Cid

Earlier in this thesis, I examined the centrality of Moorish plunder and the thematization of religious difference in *El Cantar del Mio Cid*. These are features consistent with sectarian antagonism, particularly in the context of a story of *Reconquista*. While these elements of *El Cid* are certainly present and deeply entrenched in the ideology of Reconquest, there also exist examples of more tolerant attitudes towards religious alterity. Furthermore, some of these instances of tolerance do not only exist for the narrative aggrandizement of the Cid himself. Without necessarily contradicting its status as a *Reconquista* epic, *El Cid* puts forth one of the most tolerant attitudes towards religious alterity among the texts examined in this thesis.

To start, the religious heterogeneity of both the Cid’s armies and his conquered lands provides an opportunity for the Cid to demonstrate his attitude towards the Moors whom he is not fighting. Though the text frequently frames the Cid’s military exploits in the languages of Holy War (when battling Moors, specifically) and divine providence (regardless of the opponent), it also acknowledges the presences of Moorish soldiers in the Cid’s armies.¹³¹ For the

¹³¹ For instance, the Cid declares that his armies fight “in the name of God and the apostle Saint James,” to which “His men all said ‘With all our will and all our heart’” (*The Song of the Cid*, Canto 2:93, 119-120.). Later, the poet attributes the Cid’s victory outside Valencia to divine will, proclaiming “thanks to God, the Moors were defeated,” and the Cid himself acknowledges “God and all his saints wanted exactly this” (*The Song of the Cid*, Canto 2:95, 123.) Similar exclamations and asides can be found throughout the text.

poet's purposes, the Cid's use of Muslim soldiers does not detract from the spiritual legitimacy of his actions; whatever apparent contradiction this might seem to introduce is simply ignored (or, alternatively, may pose no contradiction whatsoever). After the Cid conquers the Moorish town of Alcocer and plunders the fallen enemy soldiers, he decides that the town's residents "ought to be given something" from his newly acquired loot.¹³² In turn, the conquered Moors of Alcocer grow to love the Cid, and when he sells the town, the Moors, lamenting his departure, tell him "Our prayers will always precede you! We're deeply satisfied, our lord, with all you've done."¹³³ Even as a conqueror, he treats the Moors of Alcocer with such kindness and generosity that they would prefer to be ruled by him than to be returned to Muslim rule.¹³⁴

The Cid, whom the poem goes at length to show is essentially morally infallible, treats the Moors he enlists or conquers in magnanimous and respectful ways.¹³⁵ This would seem to suggest that, in spite of the poem's insistence upon acknowledging religious difference, the poet is advocating for some degree of religious toleration. One might argue, however, that the positive depictions of the conquered Moor or the Moorish soldier are, like the looting of Moors discussed earlier, used to poetically enhance the nobility of the Cid rather than betray an authentic form of religious toleration. He pays his Moorish soldiers just as he pays his Christian troops, and he is a generous ruler of all whom he conquers, *even* the Moors. This more cynical reading of the Cid's apparent tolerance, while plausible in these cases, could not be applied to the narrative treatment of the character Abengalbón.¹³⁶

¹³² *The Song of the Cid*, Canto 1:40, 55.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Canto 1:46, 59.

¹³⁴ The towns which bought back Alcocer were "happy he was leaving... / But not Alcocer, which he had treated so well." *Ibid.*, Canto 1:46, 59.

¹³⁵ It is reasonable to assume that, in the universe of the poem, the character of the Cid represents a moral ideal; he never comes close to losing a battle or even makes any mistakes, and the aforementioned insistence by the poet upon acknowledging his divine favor suggests a connection with Christian virtue. The drama of the poem is not incited by a failure of the Cid, but rather the betrayals of envious rivals.

¹³⁶ In other translations, referred to as "Avengalvon"

The primary focus of this section is the character of Abengalbón, a Moorish noble and close ally of the Cid. Abengalbón is notable for being the only apparent peer of the Cid who actively aids the Cid in his ventures. The Cid's closest friend, Minaya Alvar Fañez, a Christian, is still a subordinate, bound by vassalic obligation. Abengalbón, on the other hand, bears no such obligation, but instead helps the Cid out mutual friendship and admiration. He is described as "sturdy, young, and bold," and Minaya calls him "an ideal friend" to the Cid.¹³⁷ Upon receiving the company of the Cid's soldiers and later the Cid himself, Abengalbón showers his guests in gifts and feasts. When the Cid prepares to marry his daughters off to the villainous Carrión brothers, he entrusts his wife and children to the care of Abengalbón to escort them. The Carrión brothers are caught in a plot to murder and loot Abengalbón, who spares the two only out of "Love for my Cid."¹³⁸ If material wealth and the sharing thereof, adherence to chivalric custom, and devotion to allies are signifiers of honor and nobility in the moral universe of *El Cid*, Abengalbón's virtue is only bested by that of the Cid himself. He stands in sharp contrast to the Christian Carrión brothers, who are nobility as well, but are craven, avaricious, and morally bankrupt. As Norman Daniel notes, "Moors are deliberately terrorized [by the Cid]... Yet the villains of the story are Europeans, Christians, and nobles of ancient lineage; cowards, not adventurers."¹³⁹ Where the Cid's other peers are indifferent or actively plotting against the Cid, it is only Abengalbón who allies with the Cid, in doing so exhibiting a chivalric virtue that transcends religious difference.

As discussed earlier, religious difference is rarely ignored in the text, and the poet does not make exception for Abengalbón; his faith is the first thing we learn about him, as he is

¹³⁷ Ibid., Canto 3:127, 183., and Ibid., Canto 2:83, 109.

¹³⁸ Ibid., Canto 3:127, 183.

¹³⁹ Norman Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe*, 82.

introduced as “Abengalbón, the Moor.”¹⁴⁰ Nothing in the text, however, suggests that his nobility and virtue exist *in spite of* his faith.¹⁴¹ Only once does Abengalbón make a direct reference to his own faith, when he exclaims “May God [*Dios*], who rules world, take care / That my Cid does not regret this marriage affair.”¹⁴² Elsewhere in the poem, the poet acknowledges specific theological differences between Islam and Christianity, but here has Abengalbón pray to the same “Dios” as the Cid rather than “Allah” or “Apollo”.¹⁴³ In this way, Abengalbón is not like the Muslims the Cid faces in battle; rather, religious difference – while still acknowledged elsewhere – is seemingly downplayed. For the poet, Abengalbón’s faith, while necessary to point out, is seemingly of little consequence.

Abengalbón, unlike characters such as King Búcar and the Carrión brothers, or the Moors the Cid enlists or conquers, does not appear to be just a narrative vessel for the Cid to demonstrate his honor. In fact, he appears to give more than he takes in their relationship, throwing more feasts for the Cid and escorting his wife and daughters across the countryside. Abengalbón is virtuous in his own right, and at no point appears encumbered or diminished by his religious alterity. The poet utilizes religious difference *situationally* to amplify the moral virtue of the Cid’s conquest and plunder (as per the chapter on conquest and loot) but can also emphasize or downplay its importance to suit the poem’s literary needs.

It would be erroneous, therefore, to read *El Cid* as a progressive work of religious pluralism. The instances of toleration examined above should be compartmentalized in the context of a *Reconquista*-era narrative that highlights religious difference. At the same time, the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., Canto 2:83, 105.

¹⁴¹ Conversely (and rather obviously), nothing would suggest that his nobility is derived *from* his Muslim faith

¹⁴² Ibid., Canto 3:128, 185.

¹⁴³ In the battle of Valencia, the poet describes how, rushing into battle, “The Moors cried ‘Mohammad!’ The Christians, ‘Saint James!’,” suggesting that the poet is familiar with specifics of the Islamic faith (Ibid., Canto 1:36, 51.).

text's treatment of religious difference is far more nuanced than any given anti-Islamic polemic. Why explains this nuance in *El Cid*? The presence of a character like Abengalbón suggests a balance of practicality (the poet's literary goals, the political or military necessity of allying with Moors) and ideology (Christian supremacy and the *Reconquista*) that errs towards the former. In broader terms, *El Cid* reflects the realities of *Convivencia* in the time and place it was written in. Of course, foreign Muslims such as the Moroccan King Bùcar could be easily *Otherized*, but the closer contact of alliance and friendship that the Cid and Abengalbón share made those traditional ideological barriers less pronounced. Spanish Christian society was at once engaged *Reconquista* – a Holy War – and collection of narrow relationships (alliances, friendships, and vassalry) which could, in the right circumstances, transcend religious difference. *El Cid* may not be tolerant – it certainly does not *celebrate* religious diversity – but betrays the possibility of an ambivalence towards religious difference.

4c: Boccaccio and the Parable of the Three Rings

Next to the *Commedia*, Giovanni Boccaccio's (1313-1375) frame story *The Decameron* stands as one of the most significant works in the medieval Italian literary canon. In spite of their loose contemporaneity, shared Tuscan heritage, and parity of literary achievement, the two texts differ in their narrative scope and greater philosophical intentions. As Thomas Bergin notes, there is an important comparison to be made between the two: where the *Commedia* explores “the depths of Hell... the lofty Emyrean,” *The Decameron* shows us “all the known world from the Orient to the British Isles.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, Dante's academic interest in the eschatological and abstract is much less pronounced in *The Decameron*, which is more concerned with the

¹⁴⁴ Thomas G. Bergin, “Introduction: Presenting Giovanni Boccaccio” in *The Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella, (New York: Signet Classics, 2010) xxix.

worldly realities of human lives. Considering Boccaccio's background, then, it is unsurprising that *The Decameron* features the most tolerant treatment of Islam in this study.

Giovanni Boccaccio was born during a significant social shift in Italy: the 14th century emergence of a mercantile middle class. This new class was despised by the likes of Dante, who referred to them as “upstarts and profiteers.”¹⁴⁵ Boccaccio's father, a successful merchant, was part of this new class, but also participated in the politics of the traditional order. Consequently, Boccaccio was well-educated, and exposed to both the courtly realm and the “cultural and artistic milieu” of the “mercantile life in Naples.”¹⁴⁶ *The Decameron* is, in large part, the sum of the mercantile-middle class experience, and unafraid to poke fun at corruption and failures of the religious and political establishments. In contrast to Dante's work, the “mercantile epic,” as it is called, was popular among middle-class readers rather than the highly educated literary circles.¹⁴⁷

The Decameron was completed in 1353, a few years after the first major outbreak of the Black Death in Italy. It is events of the Black Death which establish the framing of its stories: a group of people sheltering from the plague exchange one-hundred stories across ten days. These stories deal with characters of all social strata and geographical background, and generally feature some kind of moral lesson (though they may not shy away from humor or bawdiness).¹⁴⁸ Four stories in *The Decameron* feature Muslim characters in pronounced narrative roles, though

¹⁴⁵ Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and his Works*, trans. Richard Monges, (New York: New York Press, 1976), 276.

¹⁴⁶ Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and his Works*, 28-9.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁴⁸ *The Decameron* features multiple story tellers, but it is safe to assume that Boccaccio “endorses” the moral lessons each one espouses; when the text returns to the frame narrative, there is typically brief segment dedicated to the audience's positive reaction to the previous story. Additionally, each narrator is praised for their respective virtues.

only one actually deals with interfaith issues – I will briefly canvass the other three and their implications before delving into it.

The seventh story of the second day is a longer, comedic narrative about the daughter of the Sultan Beminedab, who is lost at sea on her way to get married to a Moorish King.¹⁴⁹ During her return journey, she is beset by numerous misadventures, and ends up in short, ill-fated relationships with nine different men. When she returns home, she deceives her father into believing that she is still a virgin, and he marries her off as originally intended. At face value, this story might be read as a pejorative jab at Muslims; the Sultan is gullible, the daughter is lascivious, etc. However, *The Decameron* is replete with comparably comedic or racy stories targeting Christian nobility, clergy, and so on. The role of Muslim characters and lands in this story is better understood as an exotic framing device rather than a targeted insult. The same can be said for the ninth story of the second day, which features an unnamed sultan who takes in a woman falsely accused of swindling her husband.¹⁵⁰ Once the reality of her plight is revealed to him, he praises her virtue, showers her with gifts, and has the accuser punished harshly. His magnanimity, sympathy, and fantastic wealth match some of the traditional depictions of Saladin that appear in the contemporary literature.

Finally, the ninth story of the tenth day sees Saladin himself play a central narrative role. As the narrator prefaces, this story about “one of Saladin’s generous deeds” is intended to extoll the virtue of “acts of courtesy.”¹⁵¹ Saladin, disguised as a merchant, is kindly hosted by a nobleman named Messer Torello. Later, Torello goes on Crusade, and is captured. Saladin, remembering the kindness the man showed him earlier, heaps lavish gifts unto him, and has a

¹⁴⁹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 127.

¹⁵⁰ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 165.

¹⁵¹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 768.

magician warp him back to Italy. Again, this tale features the traditional depictions of Saladin's material wealth and noble virtue, with an additional twist of Orientalized mystique in the use of magic. In general, these stories seem to employ the Muslim Orient as a literary means of producing exotic intrigue, and defer to classic stereotypes about the East. Furthermore, Muslim characters can be more virtuous than some Christians. The emphasis on the material wealth of the Muslim world, along the contrast with ignoble Christians, resembles the attitude of *El Cid*; it understands the presence of a meaningful sense of alterity without hinging all moral value on religious affiliation.

This approach to religious difference is detailed very early in *The Decameron*, in the third story of the first day. This tale sees Melchisedech, a wealthy and wise Jewish man brought before Saladin, who is in dire need of money. Saladin, seeing no other way to produce his funds, and not wanting to use force, resorts to "colorful pretext" to trick Melchisedech.¹⁵² Saladin's request is simple: "I would like you [Melchisedech] to tell me which of the three Laws you believe to be the true one: the Jewish, the Saracen, or the Christian."¹⁵³ Melchisedech, sensing that the question is a trap, responds with a parable. In his story, a fabulously well-crafted ring is passed down as an heirloom to the worthiest son of each generation. Eventually, one of the fathers in this lineage is faced with the dilemma of choosing a worthiest son from his "three handsome and virtuous sons, all of whom were equally obedient to their father, and... were equally loved by him."¹⁵⁴ Rather than choose, the father takes the ring to a gifted jeweler who makes two copies which are so similar that even the father can hardly identify the original. At his death, each son receives a ring, and the three make mutually exclusive claims to the possession

¹⁵² The text does not detail how this ploy would result in Saladin winning the money – perhaps this kind of detail is less important than the greater moral of the story (Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 43).

¹⁵³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 44.

¹⁵⁴ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 44.

of the original until they realize that the truth of the matter is fundamentally unknowable.

Melchisedech concludes the story by explaining the message of the metaphor:

*Each [of the three Laws] believes itself to be the true heir, to possess the true Law, and to follow the true commandments, but whoever is right, just as in the case of the rings, is still undecided.*¹⁵⁵

Impressed by the story, Saladin reveals his original plan to Melchisedech, and decides to humbly ask for the money outright. Melchisedech lends the money, which Saladin eventually pays back in full along with many luxurious gifts. Afterwards, the two remain close friends and confidants.

There are three levels to this section that should be analyzed: its role in the frame narrative of *the Decameron*, the story of the day told by the narrator, and the parable relayed from one character to another within that story. To start, the narrator establishes that the intention of her story is to demonstrate the value of intelligence, which “can rescue the wise man from the gravest dangers and restore him to a secure state.”¹⁵⁶ From this, we can understand Melchisedech to be the “wise man” – as such, we might trust his character to be attuned to some greater truth the narrator (and therefore Boccaccio) wishes to impart. Melchisedech’s parable is more than a clever response within the narrative, it is part of the message of the story. In fact, the frame story of Melchisedech and Saladin sees the fruits of the parable’s moral lesson come to bear.¹⁵⁷ The story begins with the introduction of an interreligious conflict (though not specifically theological in nature) and the presentation of a theological question which are both resolved to mutual benefit after the presentation of the parable. Finally, the parable is sure to assert the equal

¹⁵⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 45.

¹⁵⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 43.

¹⁵⁷ Iris Shagrir, *The Parable of the Three Rings and the Idea of Religious Toleration in European Culture*, 1st ed. (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019,) 100.

virtue of the sons (i.e., the three faiths) and the father's equal love of each (i.e., God's love for each of the faiths).

Melchisedech's parable, known as the "Parable of the Three Rings," is not actually original to *The Decameron*, but rather has been rehashed and iterated upon since at least the 8th century.¹⁵⁸ Boccaccio's version, however, includes several novel alterations which suggest some nuances specific to his own view. First, he includes the historical element of the ring having been passed on for generations without trouble until the introduction of competing inheritors, symbolizing the history of Judaism until the introduction of Christianity and Islam.¹⁵⁹ Second is his notion that the sons were all equally virtuous and worthy. Together, these two alterations seem to suggest that, in the metaphor, the originality of the inherited ring is less important than the inheritance itself; Melchisedech, editorializing, describes the Abrahamic faiths as "three Laws given to three peoples by God our Father," implying that each of the religions has some divine element.¹⁶⁰ This should not be read as outright religious pluralism – after all, the matter of a "true" religion is still "undecided" – but rather an expression of each system's equal claim to truth. If each claim is equally valid, then intolerance and interreligious conflict are senseless and unnecessary.

As Iris Shagrir details in her study on the iterations of the Parable of the Three Rings throughout the Middle Ages, religious tolerance was not understood as an inherent virtue until the eighteenth century.¹⁶¹ This might suggest, then, that kind of tolerance espoused in this version of the Parable is extrinsically tailored to some situational need or ideology. In the case of *The Decameron*, we see the Parable appear as a reflection of a burgeoning Humanist

¹⁵⁸ Iris Shagrir, *The Parable of the Three Rings and the Idea of Religious Toleration in European Culture*, 12.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁶⁰ Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 45.

¹⁶¹ Iris Shagrir, *The Parable of the Three Rings and the Idea of Religious Toleration in European Culture*, 8.

movement; there is a skepticism towards religious institutions and emphasis on the practical realities of human life.¹⁶² At the same time, it is clear from his contributions to the Parable that there was something to his argument that extended beyond a callous and pragmatic toleration. Historically, Boccaccio was situated in a Mediterranean world with close social and economic ties to the *Convivencia* of Iberia and the Arab-inflected Sicilian Courts, as well as an intellectual connection with the Arab-Aristotelian tradition. Due to his upbringing and social situation in the mercantile realm, he was at the front of many such exchanges. As such, a tolerant society would have been a little more possible in the mind – or at least the ideals – of a man like Boccaccio.

¹⁶² In fact, the preceding story in the frame narrative details the rampant corruption in the Church. *Ibid.*, 97.

Conclusion:

This thesis has examined just a few of the various ways the *situational alterity* of Islam has manifested in medieval literature. What is most striking about these portrayals is the fact that they are more than just expressions of the theological precepts of Christian exclusivism. Of course, medieval authors almost always acknowledged religious difference – how could they not in a society so thoroughly rooted in the power of religious institutions? Religious difference was as important of a descriptive detail as hometown or political allegiance, if not more so. At the same time, the depictions and textual *use* of Muslims have motivations that go deeper than the ideological. Muslims, or the “threat” of Islam, could be a tool of political legitimacy, as it was for Alfonso X in Iberia, and could justify otherwise frowned-upon practices associated with conquest and looting. They could also be deployed as a rhetorical tactic, as in the anti-Islamic critiques used to defame Frederick II and his followers. Anti-Islamic sentiment was commonly utilized by Christian authors of the era for a variety of reasons but was also not absolute. As the previous chapter showed, religious alterity could be downplayed, some Muslims might be lauded, even, and surprisingly tolerant attitudes were indeed possible in the right settings.

I chose to conclude this thesis with a close look at Boccaccio because *The Decameron*, in a way, punctuates the late Middle Ages. The mercantile epic not only reflects certain cotemporary values but also reflects *upon* the values of the preceding centuries. In the biography *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, Vittore Branca writes:

Boccaccio was deeply attuned to the spirit and culture of the Middle Ages, as has been said. For this reason, he instinctively feels and succeeds in portraying in the Decameron the wonderful and ideal continuity between the age of the knights of the sword and the world of the knights of human ingenuity and industry; between those regal figures, solitary and shining with gems, and the heroes of the Italian middle class... In its themes, its structure, and in its imagination the Decameron stands as a monument to the

*highest style of the Middle Ages. But as with epics and literary testaments in general, the Decameron glorified an age that was coming to an end.*¹⁶³

As Branca eloquates here, Boccaccio wrote at profound movement of cultural transformation – an overhaul of the Italian cultural *situation*. The new world that succeeded Boccaccio’s own would hardly be one of perfect interreligious tolerance and acceptance; sectarian conflict and persecution would, of course, continue well into the proceeding ages. At the same time, a Mediterranean world connected by trade through Boccaccio’s own emerging middle class created more opportunities for understandings of religious alterity that could more closely resembled the values of the Parable of the Three Rings than the polemics of Alfonso X.

The presence of this *situational alterity* points towards a medieval society that was more ideologically flexible than is often believed. Yes, depictions of the religious *Other* were often limited by the Christian cultural hegemony (one which might punish or ostracize people perceived to be overly-sympathetic to non-Christians), but the nuance lies in how these Christian authors worked *within* this context. Indeed, the world of the medieval Mediterranean, colored by diverse cultural influences and interfaith political and economic ties, allowed for all sorts of possible motivations and types of attitudes towards religious difference, including a kind of *ambivalence* – one not typically associated with the Christianity of the Middle Ages. Bearing this in mind, one might come to see this nuance play out in other elements of medieval society. The competing, at times even contradictory literary treatments of the religious *Other* in these texts grants us an insight into the complexity of motivations and ideologies in medieval Christendom.

¹⁶³ Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and his Works*, 215.

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